

A vibrant photograph of a woven basket filled with a variety of fresh vegetables. The basket is placed on a bed of small, light-colored pebbles. The vegetables include long green beans, several red and yellow cherry tomatoes, a large green cucumber, several purple and green eggplants, and various types of green and yellow peppers. Some green leafy vegetables are also visible in the background.

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Quick Tips & Planting Plans

EASY EDIBLE GARDENING

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EASY EDIBLE GARDENING



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CHAPTER 1

Inspiration

Real-life lessons from home gardeners with a passion for growing food



The Entertainer

For one Santa Barbara gardener, the opportunity to grow and cook never ends. Here are secrets from her ever-changing edible backyard.



Valerie Rice reaches for green beans. “The garden is the starting point for almost every meal,” she says, “whether for 100 people or just my family.”

WHEN VALERIE RICE WAS GROWING UP, for all she knew carrots and broccoli sprouted from supermarket shelves. “I thought all food came from Ralphs,” says Valerie, whose family lived in a planned community in Newport Beach, California. Then, as a fifth grader, she visited her grandmother in Belgium. Digging potatoes and greens in her grandma’s garden—and feasting on dishes like potato-leek soup and braised endive wrapped in ham—was a revelation. “That’s when the seed was planted for my future garden,” says Valerie. “I wanted that life.”

Back in California, Valerie “cooked up a storm” throughout her childhood. In her postcollege apartment, she dabbled in container gardening. When she moved into her house outside Santa Barbara more than 10 years ago, Valerie planted her first edible garden. At the beginning, it was far from the Eden she had imagined—she had picked a spot that was too shady, for one—but through trial and error, and by tapping farmers at local markets for gardening advice, she learned.

Today, the 14½- by 29-foot walled garden explodes with edibles all year. Unlike many vegetable gardens, Valerie’s yard is designed for year-round good looks as well as abundant production. Bamboo trellises turn bean vines into architecture, and apple trees are espaliered near the back wall. In summer, the beds spill with sweet corn, red-speckled beans, lemon cucumbers, and Padrón peppers—“things I can’t find in markets,” she says. In fall, Romanesco broccoli, watermelon radishes, and greens take over.

“The garden takes the guesswork out of menu planning,” says Valerie, who feeds her

family of four (she and her husband have two daughters, ages 8 and 10) almost entirely from the garden. It also serves as the starting point for frequent dinner parties. “I grab a notebook and head outside a couple of days ahead of time to see what will be ready to harvest.” When guests arrive, “everyone wants to see what’s growing,” says Valerie. “We tour the garden, glasses of wine in hand, nibbling as we go.”

When friends began asking Valerie to share her recipes several years ago, she launched a garden-food blog, eat-drink-garden.com. The blog, which now has a following well beyond her Santa Barbara community, “has pushed me to be a more creative cook and gardener,” she says. But like her grandmother, Valerie takes a simple, unfussy approach to cooking. Her motto? “Pick. Mix. Serve.”



A stylish assortment of useful tools.



Summer crops, from basil to sunflowers, fill three raised beds.



A rainbow harvest.



Valerie (bottom photo) seeks out special varieties to grow in her garden, including striped 'Green Zebra' tomatoes (above) and bright orange 'Aji Amarillo' peppers (below). Growing her own food offers much more diverse (and tasty) produce than she can find in any grocery store.





GROW

Valerie's tricks to raising edibles



EASY RAISED BEDS

Valerie built her 4- by 8-foot raised beds from kits and lined them with wire mesh to deter gophers. They accommodate an ever-changing cast of edibles, planted in rows—lowest crops in front and tallest in back—so sunlight reaches them all.

“GOURMET SOIL”

Valerie mixes potting soil with sand, compost, and an organic amendment containing bat guano and worm castings (G&B Organics; kelloggsgarden.com). After planting, she dusts soil with cottonseed meal or kelp meal. “I always want to rush the planting stage, but hard prep work pays off.”

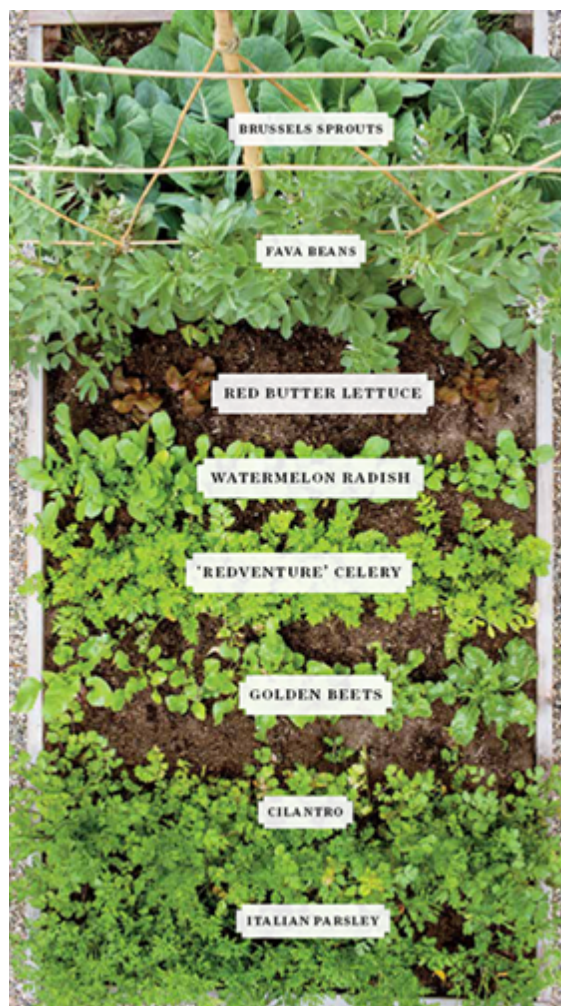
EXTRA BEDS

Near the main garden, Valerie created a “veggie oasis” by turning wooden tree boxes into raised beds. (You can buy them at many nurseries, though they’re not always clearly for sale.)

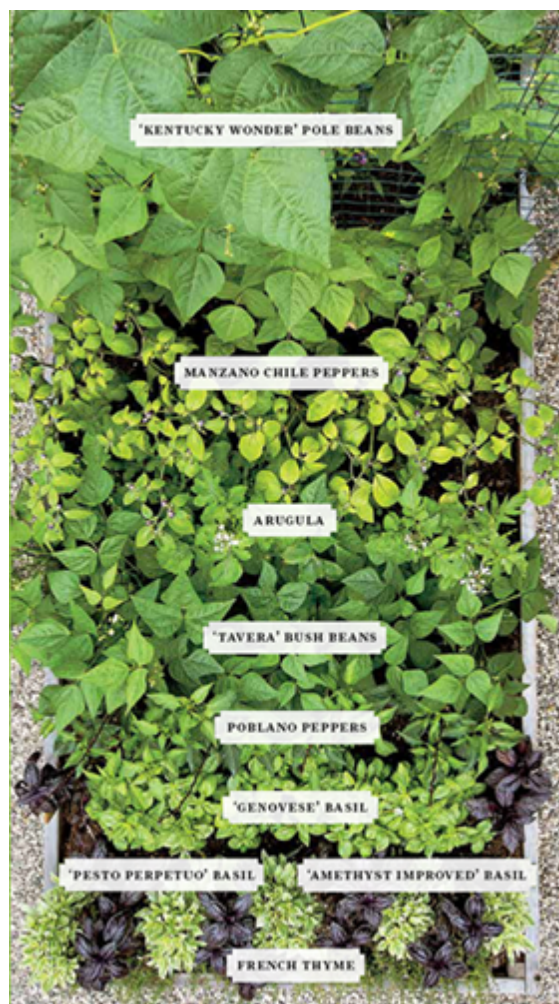
DIY TRELLISES

To support fava beans, Valerie ties together bamboo stakes with twine. For staking tomatoes, she makes tipis of fruit tree prunings. Vining crops stay tidy in tomato cages; Valerie turns the cages upside down and gathers ends in a finial.

SPRING



SUMMER



HARVEST

How she makes the most of her bounty



STICKING TO A SCHEDULE

Valerie tackles pruning and weeding on Tuesdays and harvesting on Fridays to replenish the food supply for the weekend. She frequently replants bare spots with new crops. “Keeping at it keeps it easy,” she says.

EXTENDING THE SEASON

Valerie preserves anything she doesn’t use immediately. She dries apple, chile, squash, and peach slices in a dehydrator. Fruits get puréed and turned into fruit leathers; fresh tomatoes, broccoli, and green beans are put in resealable plastic bags and frozen.

MAKING USE OF EVERYTHING

When harvesting, Valerie never overlooks crops that appear a little overripe. “String beans are so tender when I first harvest them,” she says. Left on the vine, they toughen up, “so I parboil them in salty water, then braise them with cherry tomatoes and sherry. I’ve opened up my cooking repertoire by using veggies in all stages.” She also finds uses for every last bit of her crops, tossing broccoli leaves and flowers into salads, and tucking tomatillo clippings into bouquets.

The Accidental Farmers

Mulberries may be elusive, but their flavor is extraordinary, as discovered by this family of backyard growers.



If you plant bare-root trees in winter, you'll be able to harvest in early summer; the Lynches pick mulberries from May through August.

KEVIN AND MONICA LYNCH didn't set out to become urban farmers. The husband and wife, both schoolteachers, started as novice gardeners, just trying their hand at various edibles in their Palo Alto, California, backyard. Then they tasted a berry off their first spindly mulberry tree. "It was love at first bite," says Monica.

The flavor was unlike any fruit they'd tasted—sweeter and more complex than a blackberry, with a slightly grassy-tasting stem running through the core of the fruit. And unlike some other berries, which can be hit or miss, says Kevin, "every mulberry is really good."

Unable to find mulberries in markets, the couple planted more trees. Ten years later, their backyard is a mini orchard, and the Lynches have reorganized their lives around the summer harvest season. "We used to go to San Diego and spend five days at the beach each summer, but now we pick mulberries," Kevin says. With their iPods on

and containers dangling from lanyards around their necks, the couple work from dawn to dusk, staining their fingers with purple juice.

While they've found plenty of uses for their berries at home (they may have invented the mulberry martini), the Lynches also sell fruit to local restaurants and at the farmers' market in downtown Palo Alto. Their young sons Osy (short for Osmanthus, the couple's favorite shrub) and Halo often man the cart. "It's a break-even business for us," Kevin says. The payoff is personal: "It started with the berries, but the friendships keep us growing."







TIPS

Grow your own



Because mulberries have a short shelf life, the best way to get them outside of a farmers' market is to plant them yourself. (*Sunset* climate zones vary by species; most Asian species, such as those grown by the Lynches, are fairly hardy and will grow in much of the West.)

CHOOSE THE TASTIEST

The Lynches have crowned these the most flavorful varieties: 'Illinois Everbearing' (*Morus alba x rubra*), a heavy producer of citrus-flavored berries; 'Pakistan' (*M. macroura*), which grows best in areas with long, warm growing seasons and bears finger-length berries with a hint of vanilla; and 'Black Beauty' (*M. nigra*), which bears juicier fruit.

TICKLE THEM. REALLY

The Lynches test for ripeness by tickling the berries, barely touching the bottoms as they move the fruit back toward the branch. If the berry releases, it's ripe. "If you need to make an effort to pull it off, it's not ready," says Kevin.

Purchase mulberry trees from Peaceful Valley (groworganic.com) and Raintree Nursery (rain.treenursery.com).

The Berry Lover

Sunset's Test Garden intern turns a small patch of land into an entire berry "room."



LAUREN DUNEC HOANG is such a connoisseur of fruit that she talks about berries the way *Sunset's* wine editor talks about Pinot. In musk strawberries, she detects undertones of melon; in the alpine variety, a hint of pineapple. "When it comes to flavor, I'm always looking for something more than just sweet and juicy," says Lauren (below).

It's little surprise, then, that for her first project as *Sunset's* Test Garden intern, Lauren created a berry "room," with two beds framed by walls of fruit, in a 12- by 12-foot patch of the Test Garden. "Berries usually get planted in the back of a large yard, in a tangled mess, but many new varieties are so compact, you don't have to hide them."

In her quest for the tidiest and tastiest strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries, Lauren scoured nurseries and talked to growers at farmers' markets, like Dan Lehrer in San Francisco. (In Dan, she found a kindred spirit who dug up some 'Mara des Bois' strawberry plants from his garden to share with her.) Though flavor was her primary criterion, she also selected berries based on staggered

ripening times—so she could graze on them from early summer all the way through fall.



THE PLAN



In the 12- by 12-foot patch, each 3-foot-wide bed is slightly curved inward “to create a sense of enclosure,” Lauren says. Taller berries grow in the middle of each bed; they’re trained against wire trellising. Beds are underplanted with strawberries to create an edging, and pots frame each corner.

PLANTING AND CARE

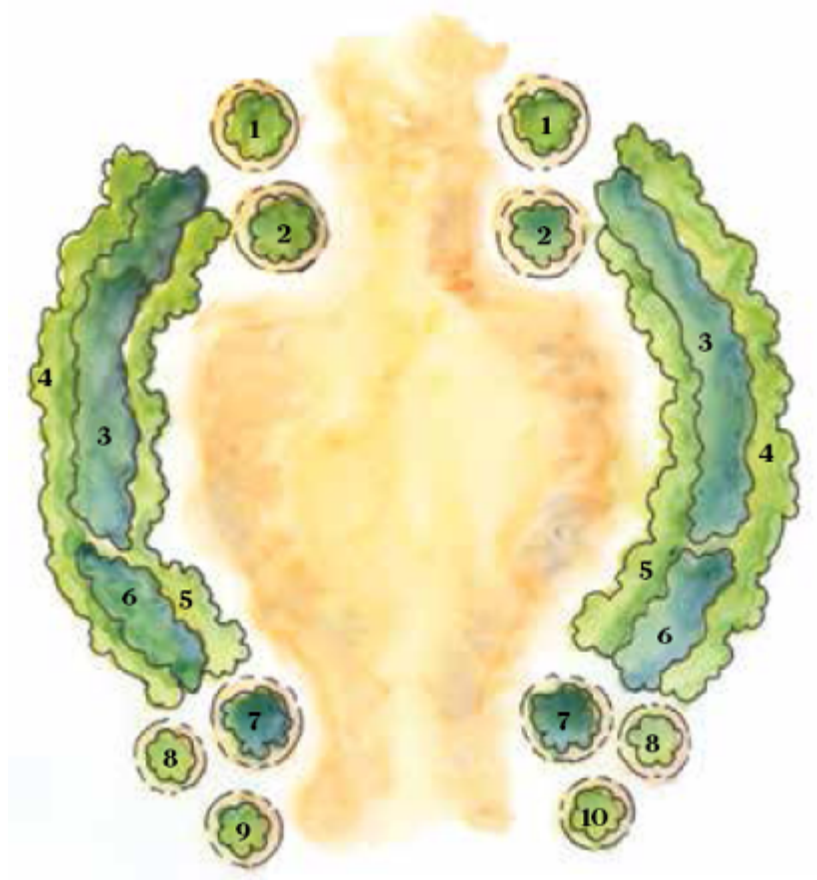
BUY Shop for bare-root plants (in winter) or container plants (in spring and summer). If you can't find what you want, order from one of the sources cited below or ask your nursery to special order.

PREP Store bare-root plants in moist newspaper until you are ready to plant; submerge the roots in a bucket of water the night before planting.

PLANT Amend the soil with compost, then dig a planting hole that's wide enough for the roots to spread out evenly. Spacing varies by variety, so consult the plant tags; avoid overcrowding.

TEND Berries appreciate some afternoon shade. Give them all regular water. Lauren loves the maintenance; she says, "I get to snack as I go."

THE PLANTS



1. RASPBERRY 'Raspberry Shortcake'



Topping out at just 12 to 24 inches high and wide, this plant thrives in a large container without trellising. Order from brazelberries.com.

2. STRAWBERRY 'Mara des Bois'



Lauren calls this variety's flavor "the essence of a strawberry." It's a favorite at Berkeley restaurant Chez Panisse. Order from edenbrothers.com.

3. THORNLESS BLACKBERRY 'Apache'



In summer, these 6- to 8-foot-tall plants yield hefty crops. The upright canes are thornless. Train them on stakes that are 4 feet apart.

4. STRAWBERRY 'Sequoia'



Large red berries of this June-bearing variety taste sweeter than most you can buy at the grocery store.

5. STRAWBERRY 'Seascape'



This everbearing variety produces large, juicy berries all summer. It does exceptionally well along the coast. Plant in containers or in the ground.

6. RASPBERRY 'Indian Summer'



This raspberry grows 5 to 6 feet tall and 6 to 8 feet wide; it needs trellising to stay tidy. Plants produce both a spring and fall crop of berries.

7. BLUEBERRY 'Bountiful Blue'



A great choice for small gardens, this compact plant (3 to 4 feet tall and wide) produces a giant crop of sweet berries and ornamental foliage.

8. BLUEBERRY 'Jelly Bean'



This plant has a spherical shape that's pretty in a pot. "It's as neat as a boxwood," Lauren says. Berries ripen from early to midsummer.

9. STRAWBERRY Musk Variety



The best way to get these tasty, aromatic berries—so fragile they rarely show up at markets—is to grow them yourself. Plants spread by runners.

10. ALPINE STRAWBERRY ‘Golden Alexandria’



You'll get tiny red berries all summer long from these everbearing plants. Lime green leaves brighten up the understory of shaded beds.

The Tomato-ist

Out of the country and into the city, this gardener finds a way to pack in the produce.



Sure, Conor plants an eggplant here and an artichoke there, but his real passion: tomatoes. He grows them in every shape and color he can find.

CONOR FITZPATRICK, WHO GREW UP eating fresh from the garden in his native Ireland, didn't let city life dissuade him from turning his Los Angeles backyard into his own private farmers' market. "There's no better fruits and vegetables than from your own garden," Conor says. He's passionate about getting people to grow organic food, so he created MinifarmBox (minifarmbox.com), a line of easy-to-assemble raised-bed kits that fit together without using a single tool.



HOW-TO

Lessons from Conor



DO THE HARD WORK UP FRONT

Reshaping a sloped part of his backyard into two flat terraces was backbreaking but worth it for the easier access to his produce.

PLANT CLOSE TO THE KITCHEN

You'll take better care of your edibles and waste less produce. When Conor sees something ripening, he automatically starts planning a meal around it.

SAY NO TO HAND WATERING

"It requires more work," he says. "If you have one hot spell and you lose a crop, it breaks your heart." Set up an auto irrigation system.

PLAN FOR HOW YOU'LL PICK

Conor tucked his perennial edibles, such as rosemary and artichokes, in with ornamentals. And he planted annual herbs in the corners of the beds where they are easy to harvest.

CHOOSE HEIRLOOM

Conor believes opting for heirloom over hybrid promotes biodiversity. And the flavors are better. He often buys seeds for their names, like the 'Mortgage Lifter' tomato.

MULCH ALL BARE GROUND

It helps retain the soil's moisture and minimizes weeds.

CREATE HARVEST STATIONS

Conor keeps large buckets of water near edible beds to pick and rinse produce on a moment's notice.

BUILD RAISED BEDS

Growing in raised beds provides better drainage and aeration than in the ground and makes harvesting easier, Conor says. In his garden, one 4- by 4-foot raised bed produces 80 pounds of tomatoes.

The Eco-Urbanist

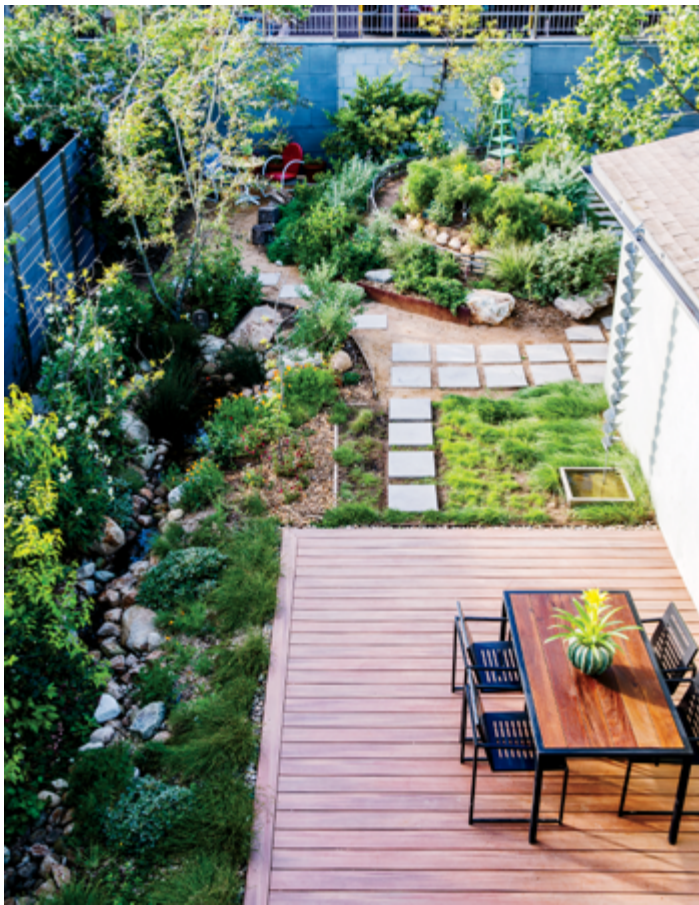
Architect Isabelle Duvivier turned her little Venice bungalow into an abundant yet water-saving powerhouse.



Why have a front lawn when you can have a bountiful garden? Isabelle's front yard is filled with tomatoes, lettuces, and peas in raised beds. Here, she harvests fava beans in a bed that sits opposite a young citrus tree and garlic.

IF YOU NEED to find architect Isabelle Duvivier, your best bet is to check outside. She's often tending to one of the four gardens that surround the perimeter of her small Venice, California, home. In the backyard, she might be serving a meal to her family on a large patio, which serves as an outdoor dining room. She could be hunting for passion fruit among the vines on one side yard or picking citrus next to the water-capturing cistern along the other. Don't forget to look up front, where she's planted her veggies. There, Isabelle might be chatting with a passerby about tomatoes over the fence she purposefully kept low. If you still can't find her, look up—she might be harvesting honey from her rooftop beehive.





Isabelle's backyard features an elevated planting she calls "Sage Hill," filled with herbs and native California native plants. A dry creekbed that fills seasonally with rainwater runs the length of the garden.

Suburban Homesteader

A ranch-style mix of edible and ornamental plants creates a downright neighborly space.



Where once was a lawn, a flagstone and gravel path leads past fruit trees and drought-tolerant ornamentals. During summer, the garden gets drip-irrigated just three times a week for 10 minutes, or slightly longer during a heat wave.

WITH ITS BORING LAWN and scratchy hedge, garden designer Marilyn Waterman's Bay Area yard, "had no soul," she says. So she created her version of a homestead, mixing edible and ornamental plants. Waterman used memories of summers spent on her grandparents' Colorado ranch for inspiration, keeping a rustic look. "When I took out the lawn, the neighbors said, 'We could never do that. Our kids need the grass,'" says Marilyn. "But the kids always come over here to skip along the paths or pick apples. There's way more to do in this yard."



HOW-TO

Veggies instead of lawn?



If you're looking to replace your lawn with an edible garden, here are your best options for removing the turf. Although you may have heard of smothering your lawn with plastic sheets, this process kills the soil biology (not a great start for any new garden—especially an edible one). Instead, try one of the following two methods.

SHEET MULCH IT

Put down 1 or 2 layers of cardboard; top them with a 2-inch layer of compost and a 3-inch layer of wood chips. Wait 6 months (enough time to plan your new garden!) for the cardboard to decompose, then plant directly into your new soil mix.

Cardboard sold in rolls is easy to spread and useful for large expanses, but because it's thinner, it punctures easily. Old boxes, while more time consuming to collect, are an ideal thickness.

DIG IT OUT

This is a tedious but effective method, particularly for pernicious grasses including Bermuda grass, crabgrass, and kikuyu. Remove lawn with shovels, water the soil, see if anything resprouts, and remove again. Then plant.



EDIBLES Spend an afternoon in Marilyn's garden and you'll find a feast: a 'Red Fuji' [apple tree](#), blueberries, strawberries, a kumquat tree, a 'Meyer' lemon tree, and herbs, including lavender and rosemary.



WATER-WISE PLANTS Marilyn mixes in succulents and friends. A rosette-shaped *Echeveria* 'Afterglow' mixes with black-stemmed *Hebe pimeleoides* 'Quicksilver', silver *Tanacetum haradjanii*, and *Muhlenbergia capillaris*.



"I planted the grapes very intentionally as a way to draw people in," says Marilyn and it definitely works. "I get a lot of parents who bring their kids over to show them where food comes from."



FENCING Where her property meets the sidewalk, Marilyn built a rustic fence with recycled 4-by-4s, wire, and turnbuckles. The fence is covered with Niabell and 'Flame Seedless' grapes, as her offering to the neighbors.



“Harvesting food is way more fun than mowing a lawn,” Marilyn points out.

The Herbalists

A trio of herb aficionados creates a dazzling garden—and best of all, virtually every plant in it can be put on your plate.



THIS EYE-CATCHING GARDEN might not look like your typical herb plot, which is exactly the point. Designers Leslie Bennett (pinehouseediblegardens.com), Stefani Bittner, and Christian Cobbs (homesteaddesigncollective.com) made a small-space herb garden that looks as good as it tastes. Containing the plants are 24-inch-high beds made out of food-safe Cor-ten steel; their curving forms make the small space feel bigger—“you walk through and don’t know what’s at the other end,” Leslie says. A tight color palette of purple, silver, and green, with a touch of red, staves off a chaotic look, creating a calm feel despite the abundance of plants (even the chairs, bottom photo, fit the scheme). While many edible gardens require a lot irrigation, the designers strived here for water conservation. They swapped annuals for less-thirsty perennial edibles, even if it meant finding unusual varieties like evergreen huckleberries—“blueberries’ low-water cousin,” says Stefani. Other picks are edible bamboo (which they used to form a hedge), pomegranates, and evergreen pineapple guavas. And they’ll let you in on their secret tip: Use your arm’s reach as a measuring

tool. Any bed you'll harvest from should be narrow enough to reach what's planted in the middle.





TIPS

Designing with herbs



Fragrant, colorful, and tough, herbs are worthy of taking center stage in your garden.



Plant something fragrant like purple magic basil where you'll brush against it.



Don't overlook edible flowers, such as bee balm.



Show off herbs in dramatic food-safe beds made of stone or inert metal.

The Winter Gardeners

Sunset's garden editors confess their love of cool-season crops.



AS MUCH AS WE LOVE ripe tomatoes, by mid-summer, we're already fantasizing about our fall vegetable garden. While rangy tomato vines and dead cornstalks make their way to the compost pile at summer's end, we replant our beds with the prettiest edibles: structural Swiss chard, voluptuous cabbage plants, and vining snap peas. By getting the garden established in the still-warm fall days and watered by rainfall, a cool-season garden looks good from autumn through spring.

Keyhole layout

A keyhole design makes the most of a small yard because it gives over minimal real estate to paths. In a larger yard, simple rows have graphic impact (think of striped farmland). Either way, make beds no wider than 4 feet for easy harvest; keep soil loose and healthy by walking on pathways only. In this Test Garden plot, we created symmetrical plantings for a flow of colors and textures. The beds measure 2 ½ feet wide and 9 feet long, connecting at one end.



1. Collard ‘Top Bunch’
2. Mustard ‘Southern Giant’
3. Collard ‘Georgia’
4. Brokali (broccoli/kale hybrid)
5. Swiss chard ‘Bright Lights’
6. Mustard ‘Red Giant’
7. Cabbage ‘Stonehead’
8. Mustard ‘Southern Giant’
9. Cabbage ‘Red Jewel’
10. Frisée
11. Viola ‘Sorbet Coconut Swirl’

Plant for variety



Naturally, it makes sense to grow what you know you'll eat, but the joy of gardening (and cooking) is in experimentation too.

NEW STANDOUTS



Cutting celery This leafy herb is more about intense flavor than crisp stalks. Keep it on hand for adding to soup stock. johnnyseeds.com.

Carrot 'Purple Sun' This 2015 introduction offers dark purple carrots that are extra crisp and sweet. reneesgarden.com.



Swiss chard 'Bright Lights' The sturdy stalks grow in a rainbow of colors. burpee.com.

CLASSIC STANDBYS



Mustard 'Green Wave' Bright green leaves practically glow in a fall garden. The hot flavor mellows when cooked, and this variety is slow to bolt. johnnyseeds.com.

Kale 'Lacinato' This dark green Italian variety is great raw (when leaves are small), sautéed, added to soups, or baked into chips. parkseed.com.



Cabbage 'Flat Dutch' This heirloom napa cabbage type produces large 10- to 15-pound heads that store well. rareseeds.com.

Play with design

1. Plant for contrast



Place different shapes and colors next to one another. Here, frilly green leaves of chartreuse mustard pop against purple cabbage.

2. Mix in flowers



Include an edge of violas for cheer; the edible blossoms can dress up winter salads too.

3. Use support



Create a simple A-frame trellis out of bamboo and wire to support vining snap peas —and add a lush backdrop to beds.

4. Keep it bountiful



Plant kale and chard to maintain structure as you pull out single-harvest crops, like cabbage.

CHAPTER 2

Garden to Table

The best backyard edibles to grow—plus delicious ways to savor their flavor



Tomatoes

Thanks to renewed interest in heirloom tomatoes, there are dozens of varieties to plant and taste—in a range of colors, sizes, and flavors, from sweet to acidic. Pick your favorites and get growing!



IN THE KITCHEN

Flavor secrets



EAT VINE-RIPENED

Fully colored tomatoes straight from the garden have the highest concentration of aroma molecules, essential to flavor. Unfortunately, there are no “vine-ripe” labels on tomatoes. The best guarantee is to buy from a farmers’ market in season. Also, a vine-ripened tomato should have a ripe aroma even uncut.

KEEP THEM AT ROOM TEMPERATURE

Aromas become inactive at cold temperatures, so a chilled tomato won’t taste as good. They do come back if the fruit is allowed to warm up. However, chilling for more than a few hours damages the cells, which can make the tomato mushy.

SAVE THE JUICE

It contains many of the volatile compounds. Pour it over slices, or add it to wherever the rest of that tomato is headed.

Tomatoes 101

A homegrown tomato is one of life's simple joys and, happily, just a few plants can supply you with dozens of fruits. There are two main types: Determinate are bushier, don't need much staking and produce their crop all at once. Indeterminate are vinelike, need staking, and produce over a long period. Here are cultivation tips from expert tomato grower Scott Daigre.



DIVERSIFY YOUR BETS

Plant a mix of varieties suitable for your area: a couple of slicers, a cherry type, a beefsteak, and something unusual, like striped ‘Green Zebra’ or the new ‘Blue Beauty’, which is high in antioxidants. And choose early-, mid-, and late-season varieties, indicated on labels as “days to maturity” (DTM). That way, says Daigre, “you’ll get lucky. If it’s too hot for some varieties to set fruit in midsummer, others will.”

PLANT DEEP

Tomato plants sprout additional roots along buried stems—a good thing since more roots are better able to absorb water and food, and support strong growth. Buy seedlings with sturdy stems and bright green leaves. Dig a hole about 15 inches deep in an area that gets at least 6 to 8 hours of sunlight a day. Fill with amended soil. Snip off the seedling’s lowest leaves, then set it into the hole and fill, burying the leafless part.

OUTSMART NATURE

In mild climates, plant a few seedlings each week for 3 to 6 weeks, so flowers appear in succession and extend the harvest. In brutally hot inland areas, screen plants during midday. In cooler climates, locate tomatoes near a south- or west-facing wall to reflect heat onto your plants.

TIME YOUR HARVEST

Tomatoes taste best if you pick them after they turn color but just as they turn soft. Daigre’s favorite way to savor a homegrown one? “Pick a ripe, beautifully colored, and slightly soft tomato. Wash it (or not). Cut it (or not). Salt it (or not). Eat it. Best done outdoors.”

Mulch

To retain moisture, Daigre covers the soil around the plants with a layer of seedless hay or straw, about 2 inches thick. Buy it at a feed store.

WATER, BUT NOT TOO MUCH

Irrigate deeply every 3 or 4 days for the first few weeks. Once plants start growing, water deeply and less often. Use soaker hoses, or try this shortcut tip: Poke small holes in the bottom of an empty coffee can, then set the can in a hole in the soil beside the plant. At watering time, fill the can; water will slowly seep into the soil.

DON'T OVERFEED

If plants overeat, they produce lush leaves but few tomatoes. Apply a balanced organic fertilizer at planting and again when flowers appear.

POT 'EM UP

Where space is limited, grow tomatoes in pulp pots at least 15 inches wide and deep, which won't fry the roots on hot summer days. Fill them with premium potting mix and rich organic amendments, with 1 plant per container. Soil warms faster in pots, so fruit ripens 14 days sooner than in the ground.

Risotto-Stuffed Tomatoes

Serves 8 / 1¼ Hours

The secret to this dish's success is to use firm tomatoes, such as those sold on the vine. Roast them on a rack near the top of the oven.



8 medium, firm-ripe red tomatoes on the vine, with small stems (2⅓ lbs. total)

4 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, divided

½ cup chopped onion

1 garlic clove, minced

⅔ cup medium-grain white rice

¾ tsp. kosher salt

½ tsp. pepper

⅛ to ¼ tsp. red chile flakes

2 tbsp. each chopped parsley and basil leaves

⅓ cup grated parmesan cheese

Flaked sea salt (optional)

1. Cut tops from tomatoes about ¾ in. from stems (keep leaves and small stems attached) and set aside. Working over a food processor and using a teaspoon, carefully scoop out tomato pulp and juices, leaving only the outer walls. Purée pulp and juices, then measure; you should have 2 cups. Trim a very thin slice from base of tomatoes so they sit flat (if you get a hole, patch from the inside with a tomato slice).

2. Heat 3 tbsp. oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Cook onion and garlic, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Add rice, kosher salt, pepper, and chile flakes, stirring to coat. Stir in tomato purée and ¼ cup water.

3. Cook uncovered, stirring occasionally, until liquid is reduced to the surface of rice, 8 to 10 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and cook, stirring once or twice, until rice is cooked through, about 15 minutes.

4. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 450° with a rack in the top third of oven. Grease a shallow baking dish with some of remaining oil. Stir parsley, basil, and cheese into risotto. Divide risotto evenly among tomato shells, mounding it a bit, and set in oiled dish, rice side up. Brush reserved tomato tops with oil and loosely set on tomatoes. Sprinkle tops with sea salt if you like.

5. Bake until tomatoes soften a bit, 12 to 15 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature.

PER SERVING 162 Cal., 44% (72 Cal.) from fat; 3.7 g protein; 8.3 g fat (1.6 g sat.); 19 g carbo (2 g fiber); 201 mg sodium; 2.9 mg chol.

Grilled Halibut with Tomato, Green Olive, and Celery Sauce

Serves 6 / 45 minutes, plus 30 minutes to stand

Inspired by the flavors of both a Bloody Mary and Italian salsa verde, this easy, bright sauce works with almost any fish.



SAUCE

1/3 cup minced red onion

1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

3 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil

2 tbsp. sherry vinegar

1 tbsp. each lemon juice and prepared horseradish

2 large inner celery stalks, finely diced

1 lb. orange or red tomatoes, finely chopped

About 1 tsp. hot sauce, such as Tabasco

About 1/4 tsp. kosher salt

2 to 3 large anchovies, minced and mashed with flat side of a chef's knife

About 8 cracked green olives, pitted* and minced

FISH

6 Pacific halibut fillets with skin, each 1 in. thick and 5 to 6 oz.

1 tbsp. olive oil

1 tsp. pepper

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. kosher salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. celery salt

- 1.** Make sauce: Combine ingredients in a bowl, adding hot sauce, salt, anchovies, and olives to taste. Set aside 30 to 60 minutes for flavors to come together.
- 2.** Heat a grill to high (about 450°). Prepare fish: In a large, shallow bowl, coat fish with oil. Combine pepper, kosher salt, and celery salt; rub all over fish. Oil cooking grate, using a wad of oiled paper towels and tongs. Grill fish, turning once, until marks appear and fish is just cooked through, 5 to 6 minutes total. Serve with sauce.

** To pit olives, smash one at a time with the flat side of a chef's knife, and cut out pit.*

PER SERVING 327 Cal., 44% (143 Cal.) from fat; 39 g protein; 16 g fat (2.3 g sat.); 5.5 g carbo (1.3 g fiber); 1,319 mg sodium; 66 mg chol.

Tomato, Prosciutto, and Ricotta Tart

Serves 8 as a first course / 1 hour

You can make this tart with any ripe tomatoes, but a mix of big multicolor heirlooms and smaller varieties looks stunning. To create a crisp, flat surface, partially bake the puff pastry with a cooling rack on top before adding the other ingredients.



1 pkg. frozen puff pastry (1 or 2 sheets, 14 to 17 oz. total), thawed

6 oz. thinly sliced prosciutto

1½ cups ricotta cheese

½ tsp. each pepper and Meyer or regular lemon zest

½ tsp. kosher salt, divided

1¾ lbs. ripe tomatoes, larger ones sliced ¼ in. thick, tiny ones cut in half

4 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil

1 tbsp. chives thinly sliced on a diagonal

2 tbsp. tiny whole fresh basil or mint leaves; or use chopped leaves

1. Preheat oven to 400°. (If pastry is in 2 sheets, cut 1 sheet in thirds along fold lines. On a lightly floured board, overlap pieces slightly with second sheet—1 piece at a short side and 2 pieces end to end along a long side. Trim to fit, then press to join.)

Roll pastry on floured board into a 12- by 16-in. rectangle. Lift pastry to a large baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

2. Cover pastry with another piece of parchment and a metal cooling rack turned upside down. Bake until pastry is golden all over, about 15 minutes.

3. Remove cooling rack and top sheet of parchment. Arrange prosciutto on pastry to cover. Bake until pastry is golden brown with no raw-looking spots in center, about 15 minutes; prosciutto will shrink. Gently press down any large air bubbles. Slide pastry on parchment to a rack and cool at least 10 minutes.

4. Combine ricotta, pepper, lemon zest, and $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt in a bowl. Dollop small spoonfuls of ricotta evenly over pastry, leaving border clear, then smear ricotta a bit (it shouldn't cover completely).

5. Arrange tomatoes over ricotta. Sprinkle with remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle with chives and basil. Cut into pieces.

MAKE AHEAD: *Through step 3, up to 2 hours.*

PER SERVING 390 Cal., 58% (223 Cal.) from fat; 16 g protein; 25 g fat (8.6 g sat.); 26 g carbo (2.3 g fiber); 980 mg sodium; 32 mg chol.

Yellow Tomato Lime Sorbet

Makes about 1 qt. / 45 minutes, plus 3½ hours to freeze

Refreshing and sweet with a hint of earthiness, this sorbet shows off tomatoes' fruity side.



3½ lbs. ripe, sweet, orange-yellow tomatoes

1½ cups sugar

About ⅓ cup lime juice

1. Cut tomatoes into chunks, then purée in batches in a food processor. Rub through a fine strainer set over a large saucepan; discard seeds and skins.
2. Stir sugar into tomato purée. Bring to simmering over high heat, then reduce heat to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, until reduced to 4 cups, about 30 minutes.
3. Nest pan in a bowl of ice water and stir occasionally until tomato mixture is cold. Stir in ⅓ cup lime juice. Add more if needed so you taste both sweet tomatoes and lime.
4. Process mixture in an ice cream maker according to manufacturer's directions.

Transfer to a bowl and freeze until firm enough to scoop, about 3 hours.

PER ½-CUP SERVING 176 Cal., 2% (3 Cal.) from fat; 2 g protein; 0.3 g fat (0 g sat.); 44 g carbo (1.6 g fiber); 73 mg sodium; 0 mg chol.

Peppers



Growing guide



Ranging from fruity and sweet to scorching hot, all peppers need a long period of warm weather to produce. Grow them in the sunniest area you have, in the ground or in large pots.

PLANT Set out nursery transplants after nighttime temperatures remain mostly above 55°F. Plant them in full sun, spaced 1½–2 ft. apart. The soil must be fertile, moisture retentive, and well drained.

CARE Water regularly so that growth is not checked. After plants are established (but before blossoms set), give them one or two applications of a balanced liquid fertilizer.

HARVEST Most peppers can be picked green or purple after they have reached good size, but flavor typically becomes fuller and sweeter as fruit ripens into its mature color, which varies by variety. Pick pimientos only when red-ripe. To harvest any kind of pepper, snip the stem with hand pruners or scissors.

Pan-Roasted Padrón Peppers

Serves 4 to 6 / 10 minutes

The classic way to enjoy Padrón peppers, this appetizer is as good at room temperature as hot. You can also make this recipe with small sweet peppers, adding a sprinkle of red chile flakes.



2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil

12 oz. (about 5 cups packed) Padrón peppers or 18 oz. mini sweet peppers

¼ tsp. red chile flakes (optional)

¾ tsp. kosher salt

Heat a large, heavy frying pan (not nonstick) or cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat until pan is very hot, about 2 minutes. Add oil and heat until just beginning to smoke. Add peppers (and chile flakes, if using sweet peppers) and cook, stirring occasionally, until blistered in places, 1½ to 2½ minutes. Season with salt.

PER SERVING 57 Cal., 72% (41 Cal.) from fat; 0.8 g protein; 4.8 g fat (0.7 g sat.); 3.9 g carbo (0.6 g fiber); 193 mg sodium; 0 mg chol.

Oil-Packed Padrón Peppers

Got a lot of peppers? Make an extra batch of [Pan-Roasted Padrón Peppers](#), pack them into 2 pt.-size jars, and cover with **extra-virgin olive oil** (about 2 cups). Chill at least 2 days. Serve peppers as snacks, toss into salads, or use as a topping for pizza. As for the flavorful oil, brush it on grilled bread, whisk it into salad dressings, or use it for scrambling eggs. Makes 2 pts. Keeps, chilled, up to 2 weeks.



Zucchini



Growing guide



Like all summer squash, zucchini are famously productive and the vines need a lot of room to grow. If you have tight space, look for bush varieties.

PLANT Direct-sow in the garden 1 in. deep when soil temperature reaches at least 55°F. Choose an open site with full sun and plenty of room. Bush and compact varieties can be planted 2–4 ft. apart in rows. Vining summer squash varieties need 5-ft. spacing in rows. Give all kinds of squash rich, well-draining soil.

CARE Roots need regular moisture, but leaves and stems should be kept as dry as possible to prevent diseases. Apply a balanced fertilizer periodically.

HARVEST Summer squash should be picked when it is small, tender, and relatively seed-free.

Zucchini and Corn Lasagna

Serves 8 / 2 hours

In this vegetable-centric (and gluten-free) dish, zucchini takes the place of the usual pasta. You can use green or yellow squash, or both. A handheld slicer makes quick work of cutting the squash.



3½ lbs. green or yellow zucchini (10 medium), ends trimmed, thinly sliced lengthwise

1¾ tsp. kosher salt, divided

3 tbsp. olive oil, divided

½ cup chopped shallots

2 garlic cloves, chopped

2 cups raw corn kernels (from 2 or 3 ears corn)

1 tsp. fresh thyme leaves

15 oz. ricotta cheese

1¼ cups shredded parmesan cheese, divided

1 large egg, beaten to blend

¼ cup chopped basil leaves

2 tbsp. chopped chives

¼ tsp. pepper

1½ tbsp. butter, divided

- 1.** Line 3 rimmed baking sheets with paper towels and arrange zucchini in a single layer on top. Sprinkle with 1½ tsp. salt and set aside 30 minutes.
- 2.** Meanwhile, heat a grill to medium (350° to 450°). Heat 1 tbsp. oil in a medium frying pan over medium heat. Add shallot and garlic and cook, stirring constantly, until beginning to brown, about 2 minutes. Add corn and thyme and cook until corn

is just hot, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a medium bowl. Stir in ricotta, half of parmesan, the egg, basil, chives, pepper, and remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt.

3. Preheat oven to 375°. Press water out of zucchini with more paper towels and remove all paper towels from baking sheets. Brush zucchini all over with remaining 2 tbsp. oil. Grill half of zucchini, turning once, until grill marks appear, 2 to 4 minutes; transfer to rimmed baking sheets as cooked. Repeat with remaining zucchini.

4. Butter bottom of a 9- by 13-in. baking dish with $\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp. butter. Arrange a quarter of zucchini ribbons crosswise in bottom of dish, overlapping slightly. Evenly spread a third of corn-ricotta mixture over zucchini. Repeat process 2 more times, ending with zucchini. Sprinkle remaining parmesan on top and dot with remaining 1 tbsp. butter.

5. Bake until lasagna turns golden brown, about 45 minutes, rotating dish halfway through for even browning. Let rest 20 minutes before serving.

MAKE AHEAD *Through step 4, up to 1 day, chilled; bake about 55 minutes.*

PER SERVING 283 Cal., 60% (172 Cal.) from fat; 15 g protein; 19 g fat (9.1 g sat.); 15 g carbo (2.5 g fiber); 492 mg sodium; 68 mg chol.

Eggplant



Growing guide



Eggplant comes in both Asian and Italian types, in various shades of purple and creamy white, and in various sizes and shapes, from round to long and skinny.

PLANT Eggplant can be grown from seed (sow indoors 8 to 10 weeks before the date of the last expected frost), but starting from nursery-grown plants is much easier. Plant them in full sun, in well-drained soil, amended with compost. Set plants 2–2½ ft. apart in rows 3 ft. apart.

CARE Keep soil moist. Feed every week or two with fish fertilizer or half-strength liquid fertilizer.

HARVEST Pick fruits after they develop some color but don't wait until they lose their glossy shine.

Braised Eggplant and Broccolini with Fried Ginger

Serves 4 to 6 / 55 minutes

Most varieties of eggplant work beautifully in this stir-fry. A side of rice is a must.



2 tbsp. each packed light brown sugar and soy sauce

1 tbsp. lemon juice

2 tsp. toasted sesame oil

¼ tsp. red chile flakes

½ cup reduced-sodium chicken broth

1 tbsp. minced fresh ginger plus ⅓ cup finely slivered fresh ginger matchsticks

1 lb. eggplant (Chinese, Japanese, regular globe, or Indian), stemmed

¼ lb. slender broccolini, cut in half crosswise

3 tbsp. canola oil

½ cup finely chopped shallots

1 tbsp. each chopped cilantro and fresh mint leaves

1. In a bowl, blend sugar, soy sauce, lemon juice, sesame oil, chile, broth, and minced ginger; set sauce aside.

2. Cut Asian eggplant into 1- by 2-in. slices or regular globe into 1½-in. chunks; or cut egg-shaped Indian eggplant in half lengthwise. Set aside.

3. Bring 3 cups water to a boil in a 12-in. wok or frying pan over high heat. Add broccolini; cook, covered, until stems are just tender, 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a

bowl of ice water; when cool, drain and set aside.

4. Drain and dry wok, add canola oil, and heat over high heat. Add slivered ginger; cook, stirring, until golden, 2 minutes. Transfer ginger to paper towels. Pour oil into a bowl; return 1 tbsp. oil to wok.

5. Add half of eggplant to wok over high heat. Cook, turning often, until lightly browned, 3 minutes. Transfer to a bowl. Add remaining oil to wok with remaining eggplant and the shallots. Cook as before.

6. Return eggplant to wok with sauce. Bring to a boil; cover, reduce heat, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until eggplant is soft when pressed, 8 to 15 minutes.

7. Lay broccolini on eggplant, cover, and heat 2 minutes. If needed, cook, uncovered, over high heat until most of liquid evaporates, 1 minute. Stir in cilantro and mint; top with fried ginger.

PER SERVING 168 Cal., 56% (94 Cal.) from fat; 3.2 g protein; 11 g fat (1 g sat.); 17 g carbo (3.6 g fiber); 387 mg sodium; 2.5 mg chol.

Cucumber



Growing guide



Most cucumbers are trailing vines that need at least 25 square feet to sprawl (though bush varieties are smaller). Cucumber choices include Armenian, slicing, and pickling varieties; most are crisp, mild, and barely sweet.

PLANT Sow seeds in the ground 1 to 2 weeks after the average date of last frost. Give vines room to ramble, with all parts in full sun. Plant seeds 1 in. deep and 1–3 ft. apart in rows 3–6 ft. apart, depending upon whether you're growing bush or vining cucumbers (wider spacing for vines).

CARE Cucumbers need a steady supply of water. Apply it in furrows or by drip irrigation—never overhead, since that encourages downy mildew. Apply complete fertilizer after plants have started vigorous growth, then repeat a month later. To reduce the amount of ground space plants use, you can let cucumber vines grow up a trellis.

HARVEST Start picking as soon as cucumber reach desired size (typically 6–8 inches long for slicing varieties). Frequent harvest ensures continued production.

Cucumber and Noodle Salad

Serves 4 / 45 minutes

Intensely flavorful Chinese sausage is worth seeking out for this salad. If you can't find it, bacon also pairs well with the sweet cucumbers and peanut dressing.



- 10 oz. dried Chinese-style noodles (lo mein or chow mein)* or spaghetti**
- 3 or 4 Persian cucumbers (about 5 in. long) or 10 oz. English or Armenian cucumbers**
- 6 tbsp. reduced-sodium soy sauce**
- 4½ tbsp. unseasoned rice vinegar**
- 3 tbsp. each toasted sesame oil and old-fashioned peanut butter**
- 1 tbsp. dark molasses**
- 1½ cups (7 oz.) thinly sliced *lop chong** (Chinese sausage) or ¾ cup chopped bacon**
- 1 cup roughly chopped cilantro**
- ½ cup sliced fresh basil leaves**
- 3 cups loosely packed salad greens**
- ¼ cup chopped roasted salted peanuts**

1. Cook noodles according to package instructions until just tender (or longer, if you prefer a softer texture that absorbs sauce more easily). Drain, rinse well with cool

water, and set aside. Cut cucumbers into ½- by 1½-in. pieces. Set aside.

2. Whisk together soy sauce, vinegar, oil, peanut butter, and molasses in a large bowl; set aside.

3. Lightly brown sausage in a large frying pan over medium-high heat, stirring, 3 to 4 minutes. Drain on paper towels.

4. Add drained noodles to peanut butter sauce, tossing to coat, then add sausages, cilantro, basil, and about two-thirds of cucumbers. Line 4 wide, shallow bowls with salad greens and add pasta. Top with remaining cucumbers and sprinkle with peanuts.

**Find at well-stocked grocery stores, Asian markets, and [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).*

PER SERVING 726 Cal., 54% (396 Cal.) from fat; 25 g protein; 44 g fat (11 g sat.); 62 g carbo (4.6 g fiber); 1,950 mg sodium; 9.1 mg chol.

Stone Fruit

Even the best store-bought plum, peach, or nectarine can't rival one grown in your backyard—the most flavorful stone fruit is often too delicate to be grown commercially. Here are some of our favorite picks to grow, from a classic peach to some Scussian-sounding new hybrids.



IN THE KITCHEN

Flavor secrets



GO FOR FRECKLES

Sun spots on nectarines are a sign of sweetness; a red blush is just a varietal characteristic. Choose fruit that's fragrant and has a little give or is only moderately firm.

WAIT TO CHILL

For the fullest flavor and juiciest texture, store nectarines at room temperature, slightly apart on a plate, until they yield slightly to the touch. Chill when fully ripe.

WHITE VERSUS YELLOW

Serve sweet, delicate white nectarines fresh and in desserts. Use yellow ones (brighter and richer-flavored) raw and cooked in sweet and savory dishes. Unlike peaches, nectarines' smooth skin can stay on for cooking.

Growing Guide

Twiggy bare-root trees don't look like much at the beginning, but planting them at this stage gives them the best kick-start for growth. Here's what you need to know about planting and caring for bare-root trees, plus landscaping options for small yards.

Buy

Nurseries are well stocked with bare-root trees early in winter. You can also order from baylaurenurseries.com. Trees come with roots packed in damp sawdust and wrapped in burlap. You can keep them in the sawdust for a day or two, but it's best to plant right away.



Soak the roots in a bucket for 45 minutes before planting.
Trim any broken pieces on the roots. Clip the rest of the roots by an inch.



Dig a hole twice as deep and as wide as the root system; form a firm cone of soil to set the plant on, making sure the crown sits just above the soil level. Backfill the hole with a mix of 50 percent native soil and 50 percent amendment, such as organic compost.



Form a basin of soil around the tree to keep water concentrated on the roots.

Care

WATER whenever the soil is dry 2 inches deep—as little as once a week in winter, or as much as once every three days in the heat of summer.

FERTILIZE trees in early spring (after blossom set), midsummer, and early fall. Use an organic fertilizer formulated for fruit trees (synthetic nitrogen can easily burn plants).

REMOVE any leaves infected with peach leaf curl (they'll be thick and twisted); the next round will grow uninfected. To prevent this fungal disease, which diminishes fruit production, keep smaller trees dry during the rainy season by tenting them with floating row covers.

THIN marble-size fruits to about 8 inches apart. For any tight clusters, remove all but the largest fruit. As painful as it may seem, thinning fruit is good for the tree.

PRUNE lightly around the summer solstice to control plant size. The waning season will discourage vigorous growth. Winter is the best time to prune for shape and structure. Pruning in late winter is almost useless for controlling size, as plants will bounce back.

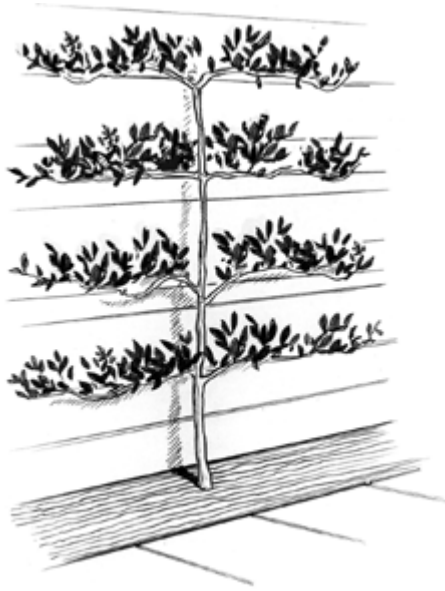
MULTIGRAFTED TREE

Although you'll be limited to the varieties the wholesaler offers, a tree grafted with multiple types of fruit is a great way to get a whole fruit salad from a single tree.

DIGITAL BONUS

Learn to care for your backyard orchard: [sunset.com/fruit-trees](https://www.sunset.com/fruit-trees).

ESPALIERED TREE



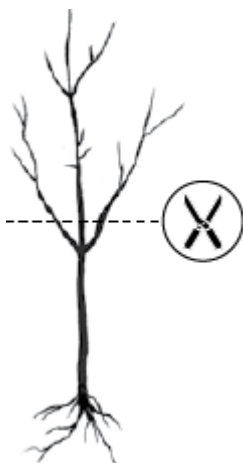
In a narrow, sunny space, train your tree to grow flat against a wall, fence, or trellis. You'll need to tether it to stakes or wires for support, then prune it to direct its growth horizontally.

In mild-winter areas, choose trees with a low chill requirement.

HIGH-DENSITY PLANTING

Grow two or even three trees in one hole, with plants placed 18 inches apart. Choose varieties that pollinate one another and have successive ripening times for the longest harvest. (Don't plant standard and semidwarf rootstocks together in the same hole.) Prune as a single tree, so limbs don't overlap.

KEEP IT SMALL



Cut your new tree to knee height. This creates lower branching and a shorter tree later on. Learn more in the book *Grow a Little Fruit Tree* (Storey Publishing, 2015; \$17).

Nectarine Caprese Salad

Serves 6 / 25 minutes

Made with white nectarines, this savory-sweet Caprese just might trump the classic version. Burrata cheese adds richness, but feel free to sub in fresh mozzarella.



1½ to 2 lbs. assorted heirloom tomatoes

3 soft-ripe white nectarines (1½ lbs. total)

8 oz. burrata cheese or fresh mozzarella

About ¼ cup small fresh opal* (purple) basil leaves or regular basil leaves

10 fresh mint leaves, whole or thinly sliced

1 tbsp. Champagne vinegar

½ tsp. regular or white balsamic vinegar

3 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil

About ½ tsp. flaked sea salt, such as Maldon

About ½ tsp. pepper

1. Cut tomatoes and nectarines into large wedges and arrange on a platter. Tear burrata into large chunks and distribute over the top, along with any escaped cream (but not the liquid from fresh mozzarella, if using). Scatter basil and mint over salad.

2. Whisk together vinegars and oil in a small bowl. Drizzle over salad. Sprinkle with $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. *each* salt and pepper, and add more to taste if you like.

** Find at farmers' markets.*

PER SERVING 228 Cal., 58% (132 Cal.) from fat; 8.2 g protein; 15 g fat (6.1 g sat.); 13 g carbo (2.7 g fiber); 297 mg sodium; 38 mg chol.

Grilled Lamb Chops with Nectarine Thyme Jam

Serves 4 / 1 ¾ hours

You couldn't ask for a better partner for lamb's mildly earthy flavor than nectarines, used here in a quick jam and sizzled on the grill. Choose fruit with red-tinged flesh for an especially pretty presentation.



About 3 tbsp. lemon juice, divided

¼ cup olive oil, divided

About ¾ tsp. kosher salt

About ½ tsp. pepper

3 garlic cloves, minced

1 tbsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary

½ tbsp. finely chopped fresh thyme leaves, 1 tbsp. whole leaves, and thyme sprigs

4 lamb shoulder chops (2½ lbs. total)

3 soft-ripe yellow nectarines (1½ lbs. total), preferably with very red skin

⅓ cup sugar

½ tsp. lemon zest

2 firm-ripe yellow nectarines (1 lb. total)

1. Whisk together 2 tbsp. lemon juice, 3 tbsp. oil, ¾ tsp. salt, ½ tsp. pepper, the

garlic, rosemary, and chopped thyme in a shallow dish. Add lamb and turn to coat. Chill, covered, 1 to 2 hours. Bring to room temperature 30 minutes before grilling.

2. Meanwhile, make jam: Put a small plate in freezer. Coarsely chop soft-ripe nectarines and put in a medium saucepan with 1 tbsp. lemon juice, 1 tbsp. water, the sugar, and lemon zest. Cook over medium heat, stirring and crushing with back of spoon, until fruit softens, 10 to 15 minutes. Boil gently, stirring, until a spoonful of jam put on the cold plate holds a soft shape, 10 minutes more. Stir in whole thyme leaves and more lemon juice to taste. Let cool.

3. Heat a grill to medium-high (450° to 500°). Cut firm-ripe nectarines in half and pit; brush with 1 tbsp. oil and sprinkle all over with salt and pepper to taste.

4. Grill chops (reserve marinade), turning once and basting with marinade, 8 to 10 minutes total for medium-rare. During last few minutes, grill nectarines, cut side down, until grill marks appear, 2 minutes. Cut fruit into wedges. Arrange meat and fruit on a platter and garnish with thyme sprigs. Serve with jam.

PER SERVING 716 Cal., 50% (359 Cal.) from fat; 45 g protein; 40 g fat (14 g sat.); 45 g carbo (4.6g fiber); 278 mg sodium; 163 mg chol.

Citrus



Growing guide



In areas with mild winters, you can grow citrus trees in dwarf or standard size for year-round beauty. Generally, sweeter citrus require more summer heat to form sugars; sour types (such as lemons and limes) require less heat.

PLANT Plant after danger of spring frost is past, but ahead of summer heat. Choose a spot in full sun, with protection from frost. Dig a planting hole that's twice as wide as the rootball, and plant with the graft union 3 in. above ground level.

CARE Water newly planted trees twice a week in normal summer weather, more frequently during hot spells.. Nitrogen is the most important nutrient for citrus. Apply 2 ounces of actual nitrogen the first year after a newly planted tree puts on new growth, then increase the amount by 4 ounces each year for the next few years. After the fifth year, apply 1 to 1½ pounds yearly.

HARVEST Citrus fruits ripen only on the tree. Judge ripeness by taste, not rind color (many varieties are fully colored before they are ripe).

Spicy Blood Orange and Lemongrass Chicken

Serves 4 / 1 ¾ hours, plus at least 2 hours for chicken to chill

Attention, citrus lovers: This dish includes zest in the lemongrass-chile rub, juice in the refreshing dressing, and peeled segments in the crunchy cucumber and shallot topping.



About 3 lbs. blood oranges (any variety)

2 stalks fresh lemongrass, ends trimmed and coarse leaves discarded, thickly sliced

4 tsp. sugar, divided

1 ¼ tsp. kosher salt

¾ tsp. red chile flakes

4 small, boned chicken breast halves with skin (2 ¼ lbs. total)

2 cups canola oil, divided

4 large shallots, thinly sliced crosswise

3 tbsp. lime juice

1 ½ tbsp. Thai or Vietnamese fish sauce

1 large Persian cucumber or ¼ English cucumber

⅓ cup cilantro leaves

1. Zest 2 large or 3 medium oranges and set oranges aside. In a food processor, whirl zest, lemongrass, 2 ½ tsp. sugar, the salt, and chile flakes until very finely minced, scraping inside of container several times. Set aside 1 tbsp. In a medium bowl, turn chicken in 1 tbsp. oil to coat. Pat evenly all over with remaining lemongrass mixture. Chill, covered, at least 2 hours.

2. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan over medium heat, cook shallots in remaining oil (about 2 cups), stirring often, until deep golden brown, 30 to 35 minutes. With a

slotted spoon, transfer shallots to paper towels to drain and crisp. Set oil aside.

3. While shallots cook, cut peel (including all white pith on outside of fruit) from unzested oranges, following curve of fruit. Working over a bowl, cut between inner membranes to free segments. Squeeze juice from membranes into bowl. Tip juice into a measuring cup; if needed, squeeze zested oranges to make about 6 tbsp. juice. Return juice to segments; set aside. Preheat oven to 450°.

4. Heat a 12-in. ovenproof frying pan over medium-high heat. Swirl 1 tbsp. shallot oil in pan and brown chicken, skin side down, 4 to 7 minutes. Remove from heat and turn chicken over. Roast chicken in oven until no longer pink in center (cut to test), 12 to 16 minutes.

5. Meanwhile, add lime juice, fish sauce, 1½ tbsp. shallot oil, reserved 1 tbsp. lemongrass mixture, and remaining 1½ tsp. sugar to oranges. (Save remaining oil for other uses.) Slice cucumber into ¼-in. rounds. Cut slices in half, then into small triangles.

6. Set chicken on plates. With a slotted spoon, lift oranges in bowl from dressing and arrange over chicken. Scatter cucumber, half of shallots, and the cilantro on top. Pour dressing into a pitcher. Serve chicken immediately, with dressing and more shallots on the side.

MAKE AHEAD *Through step 2, up to 1 day, shallots stored airtight.*

PER SERVING 678 Cal., 33% (223 Cal.) from fat; 58 g protein; 25 g fat (4.8 g sat.); 52 g carbo (8.1 g fiber); 1,127 mg sodium; 154 mg chol.

Blueberries



Growing guide



Blueberries form on branch ends of attractive shrubs, usually sold in containers, in dwarf and standard sizes. Choose a variety that's suited to your climate; in mild-winter climates, look for southern highbush varieties.

PLANT In early spring in cold-winter regions or autumn in mild climates, plant bushes in full sun. Choose a spot that gives access to the plants from all sides for easy harvest. Soil must be cool, moist, well drained, and acidic (pH 4.5 to 5.5). If your soil isn't acid, amend it with peat. Set plants at least 4–5 ft. apart.

CARE During the first 3 years, give plants a deep soaking every week during the growing season. In subsequent years, keep plants moist during the growing season but don't subject them to standing water. Don't fertilize at all the first year, and feed only lightly the second and third years. After that, fertilize once per year in early spring with an acid-forming complete fertilizer.

HARVEST Pick when fruit tastes sweet (some kinds color up before they sweeten up).

Blueberry Cheesecake Frozen Yogurt Sandwiches

Makes 15 / 1 hour, plus 5 hours to freeze

Cream cheese and vanilla beans give these treats an extraordinary depth of flavor. Just as amazing: the time saved by making the sandwiches in a big pan rather than assembling them individually.



1/3 cup blueberry preserves

Seeds from 2 vanilla beans* or 4 tsp. vanilla extract

2 cups blueberries, patted dry

30 graham cracker squares (about 2½ in.)

1 pkg. (8 oz.) cold cream cheese, cut into chunks

2 cups cold plain full-fat yogurt

¾ cup sugar

1 tsp. orange zest

1. In a medium saucepan, combine preserves and half the vanilla. Stir in blueberries and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until mixture begins to bubble, 4 to 5 minutes. Set pan in a bowl of ice water and stir often until ice cold. Set aside, replacing ice if needed so mixture stays cold.

2. Meanwhile, line a 9- by 13-in. pan with a piece of foil extending over ends.

Arrange half the crackers in pan, flat side up, in 3 rows of 5 squares with sides touching; freeze pan. Whirl remaining vanilla in a food processor with the cream cheese, yogurt, sugar, and orange zest until smooth.

3. Freeze yogurt mixture in an ice cream maker according to manufacturer's instructions, about 25 minutes. Spoon half the frozen yogurt over graham crackers and gently spread to cover, using a flexible scraper or offset spatula. Spoon berry mixture on top. Dollop remaining frozen yogurt over berries. Pat yogurt smooth.

4. Draw a knife tip through the layers all over until top looks swirled. Pull up sides of layers with scraper where they're starting to escape the crackers. Gently push remaining graham crackers into top.

5. Freeze, covered with plastic, until center is firm enough to cut, at least 5 hours. Grasping foil, lift sandwiches from pan, flip onto a work surface, and peel off foil. Turn sandwiches right side up, then cut into squares, trimming edges.

** Split vanilla beans lengthwise, then scrape out seeds with a small knife. Get the best prices on vanilla beans by buying in bulk at [penzeys.com](https://www.penzey.com).*

MAKE AHEAD Up to 1 week, individually wrapped, sealed in a plastic bag, and frozen.

PER SANDWICH 202 Cal., 34% (69 Cal.) from fat; 3.1 g protein; 7.7 g fat (3.8 g sat.); 31 g carbo (0.9 g fiber); 149 mg sodium; 21 mg chol.

Strawberries



Growing guide



There are two main types of strawberries: June-bearing (or spring-bearing) produce fruit all at once early in the season; everbearing produce in early summer through fall.

PLANT In mild-winter areas, plant standard strawberries from bare-root stock in late winter or early spring (they often come bundled in bunches). In colder climates, set out plants or bare-root stock in early spring. Place plants in full sun in rich, well-draining, acidic soil.

CARE Plants need consistent moisture during the bearing season; don't let them dry out. Drip irrigation is ideal to help reduce disease problems. Use a complete fertilizer for all kinds of strawberries. Don't fertilize heavily in spring or you'll get excessive plant growth, soft fruit, and fruit rot.

HARVEST Pinch through strawberry stems with your thumbnail when fruit has colored up completely.

Strawberry Hibiscus Cooler

Serves 6 (Makes 4½ cups) / 40 minutes

With or without the vodka, this sweet-tart drink deserves a spot at brunch.



1 cup dried hibiscus flowers*

⅔ cup sugar, divided

1½ cinnamon sticks

2 cups halved strawberries plus a few quartered or halved berries

¼ cup lemon juice

9 oz. citron vodka or regular vodka (optional)

Sparkling water

Small mint sprigs or leaves

1. Combine hibiscus, ⅓ cup sugar, the cinnamon sticks, and 2 cups water in a medium saucepan. Cover and bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes. Remove from heat and let infusion sit, covered, 20 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, in a blender, purée halved berries with remaining ⅓ cup sugar and 2 cups cold water. Strain into a metal bowl and stir in lemon juice. Set in a bowl of ice and water until cold.

3. Strain hibiscus infusion into another metal bowl and set in a bowl of ice and water until cold. (Discard soaked hibiscus, or see page 100.) Combine hibiscus infusion and berry purée in a pitcher.

4. Fill glasses with ice. Add 1½ oz. vodka to each if you like, followed by about ¾ cup berry cooler. Stir in a splash of sparkling water. Top with quartered berries and mint.

** Find dried hibiscus, called jamaica in Spanish, at well-stocked grocery stores with Latino foods, at Latino markets, and at worldspice.com.*

MAKE AHEAD Through step 3, chilled, up to 1 week; stir before using.

PER SERVING WITHOUT VODKA 106 Cal., 1.3% (1.4 Cal.) from fat; 0.4 g protein; 0.2 g fat (0 g sat.); 27 g carbo (1.2 g fiber); 0.9 mg sodium; 0 mg chol.

Rhubarb



Growing guide



Though rhubarb is really a vegetable, its tart stalks are used almost exclusively cooked and sweetened into fruitlike sauces and pies. Note: while rhubarb stalks are delicious, the leaves of most varieties are toxic—do not eat them.

PLANT In late winter or early spring, set out plants at 3- to 6-ft. intervals (most gardeners plant only one or two). Plant rhubarb in full sun in mild climates, partial shade where summers are hot.

CARE Like most plants with large leaves, rhubarb needs regular water.

HARVEST Let plants grow for two full seasons before harvesting. In the third season, you can pull off leafstalks for 4 or 5 weeks in spring; older, huskier plants can take up to 8 weeks of pulling. To harvest leafstalks, grasp them near the base and pull sideways and outward (do not cut with a knife, as cutting will leave a stub that decays). Never remove all the leaves from a single plant; stop harvesting when slender leafstalks appear.

Prosciutto Panini with Rhubarb Relish

Serves 2 to 4 / 25 minutes

These salty-sweet sandwiches are nicely sized for sharing, but you may wind up splurging and eating a whole one. A pie pan topped with cans of food makes a great improvised panini press.



2 francese or ciabatta rolls (each about 4 oz. and 3 by 5 in.); or use 2 rectangles (each 3 by 5 in.) cut from a ciabatta loaf

1½ tbsp. olive oil, divided

1½ cups shredded mixed fontina and gruyère cheeses, or sharp white cheddar

3 oz. thinly sliced prosciutto or ham

1 green onion, sliced

Rhubarb Relish (recipe at right)

1 tbsp. grated parmesan cheese

½ cup arugula leaves

1. Split rolls horizontally and lightly brush cut sides of bottom halves with a little oil. Layer them with shredded cheeses, prosciutto, and onion. Spread ¼ cup relish on each top half and set on sandwiches.

2. Heat a heavy medium frying pan, preferably cast iron, over medium heat. Lightly brush pan with oil. Add sandwiches and reduce heat to medium-low. Set a pie pan on sandwiches and top with 4 medium cans of food. Cook, gently pressing down on

cans every so often, until sandwiches are golden brown on underside, 4 to 7 minutes.

3. Remove pie pan and cans. Brush sandwich tops with a little more oil and sprinkle with parmesan. Turn over, replace pie pan and cans, and cook, pressing on cans again, until cheese is melted and second side is nicely browned, 2 to 3 minutes.

4. Cut sandwiches in half and tuck in arugula. Serve with remaining relish.

PER HALF SANDWICH 492 Cal., 42% (207 Cal.) from fat; 27 g protein; 23 g fat (10 g sat.); 47 g carbo (2.6 g fiber); 1,191 mg sodium; 62 mg chol.

Rhubarb Relish

Makes 1 cup / 20 minutes

Try this gently spicy relish alongside roasted or grilled meats, or with a cheese plate.

3 tbsp. apple cider vinegar

⅓ cup packed light brown sugar

½ cinnamon stick

½ small dried red chile, broken into pieces

½ tsp. yellow mustard seeds

Zest of 2 limes

Pinch of kosher salt

2 cups rhubarb cut into ½-in. chunks (about 4 stalks)

1 tsp. dry mustard

Cracked pepper

1. In a medium saucepan, combine ¼ cup water, the vinegar, brown sugar, cinnamon, chile, mustard seeds, lime zest, and salt. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Add 1 cup rhubarb, reduce heat to medium, and cook until fruit begins to break down, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in remaining 1 cup rhubarb and cook until it's just tender, about 5 minutes more; you want to leave fruit a little chunky.

2. Remove from heat, stir in dry mustard, and add pepper to taste. Remove cinnamon and let cool.

MAKE AHEAD *Up to 3 days, chilled.*

PER ¼-CUP SERVING 97 Cal., 5% (5 Cal.) from fat; 1 g protein; 0.5 g fat (0 g sat.); 23 g carbo (1.6 g fiber); 31 mg sodium; 0 mg chol.

Grapes



Growing guide



Grapevines can be beautiful landscape plants, offering bold foliage spring through fall and attractive branches in winter. For good-quality fruit, pick a variety well-suited to your climate: Areas with a long warm season tend to favor European grapes; cooler areas favor American ones.

PLANT Choose an open sunny spot with plenty of room. Plant year-old bare-root vines during the dormant season (winter in mild-winter regions, about 3 weeks before the last expected frost date in cold-winter areas). If planting at an arbor or fence, position each hole about 1½ ft. away from the structure and set the plant at a 45° angle so it leans toward the support. Set grapevines 8–10 ft. apart in moderately fertile loam with good drainage.

CARE Grapes are prone to fungal diseases, so avoid splashing water on leaves; drip irrigation is ideal. Fertilize each spring with a balanced fertilizer. Yearly pruning encourages better fruit production. For detailed pruning techniques, consult a nursery or your Cooperative Extension Office.

HARVEST Pick grapes when they're sweet to the taste, never sooner, since they stop ripening at the moment of harvest.

Mini Almond and Grape Cakes

Makes 9 Mini Cakes / 1 hour

Inspired by French *financiers*, these small cakes are dense with the warm flavors of almond, orange zest, and butter. The grapes become a little jammy after baking, which complements the cakes' richness.



½ cup unsalted butter, at room temperature

⅔ cup sugar

2 large eggs, at room temperature

1 cup almond flour

¼ cup all-purpose flour

Zest of 1 orange

½ tsp. vanilla extract

½ tsp. fine sea salt

18 black seedless grapes (¾ cup)

1½ tbsp. sliced almonds

Crème fraîche (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 400°. Generously butter and flour 9 cups (⅓-cup size) in a muffin pan (if possible, use a shiny rather than a dark pan). In a bowl with a mixer, beat butter and sugar until thoroughly combined and light. Add eggs and beat until incorporated, stopping to scrape down inside of bowl. Add almond and all-purpose flours, orange zest, vanilla, and salt and beat on low speed to combine.
2. Divide batter among prepared muffin cups. Poke 1 grape into batter in each cup.

Cut remaining grapes in half lengthwise; set 2 halves on batter in each cup. Sprinkle with sliced almonds.

3. Bake until deep golden brown, 20 to 22 minutes, rotating pan halfway through. Let cool in pan on a rack at least 15 minutes. Loosen cakes from pan with a knife, set on small plates, and serve with a spoonful of crème fraîche if you like.

PER CAKE 290 Cal., 61% (178 Cal.) from fat; 5.1 g protein; 20 g fat (8.5 g sat.); 25 g carbo (1.8 g fiber); 116 mg sodium; 79 mg chol.

Figs



Growing guide



Figs grow on attractive small trees, with fruits that ripen in shades of brown, purple, and green. Most varieties bear two annual crops, the first in early summer, then again in early fall.

PLANT Plant figs in full sun in a place where fallen fruit won't make a mess on a path or patio. Figs are not particular about soil, but good drainage is a plus.

CARE Water regularly for the first 2 years, then deeply every 2 weeks during the growing season. Apply a balanced fertilizer once after growth starts in spring. Avoid high-nitrogen fertilizers, which stimulate leafy growth at the expense of fruit. As the tree grows, prune lightly each winter, cutting out dead wood, crossing branches, and low-hanging branches that interfere with foot traffic. Pinch back runaway shoots in any season.

HARVEST When figs are ripe, they detach easily when lifted and bent back toward the branch. Keep fruit picked as it ripens. In late fall, pick off any remaining ripe figs and clean up fallen fruit.

Chocolate and Sea Salt Fig Lollipops

Makes 12 / 45 minutes

A quick chill between dunks in chocolate ensures that the skewers stick to the figs. You'll need 12 flat bamboo skewers* (¼ in. wide and 3½ in. long) or wooden coffee stirrers cut to this size; paper or plastic ones slide out.



1 cup bittersweet chocolate baking wafers, such as Guittard, or bittersweet chocolate chips
4 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil

12 figs, preferably a mix of green and black varieties (see page 80), stems trimmed

1 tsp. flaked sea salt, such as Jacobsen

1. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside. Combine chocolate and oil in a 2-cup glass measuring cup and microwave, stirring every 30 seconds, until smooth and liquidy, about 1 minute total.

2. Dip bottom of each fig in a little chocolate to coat and set on lined baking sheet. Working with one at a time, dip skewers about 1½ in. into chocolate and pierce top of fig with chocolate-dipped stick. Chill until chocolate firms and sticks adhere to figs, about 20 minutes.

3. If needed, microwave measuring cup of chocolate in 15-second increments just until thick but pourable. Lift 1 fig from paper and dip all but top third into chocolate, letting excess drip off. Return fig to lined baking sheet and sprinkle chocolate with salt. Repeat with remaining figs.

4. Chill figs until chocolate hardens, 10 to 15 minutes more.

** Find at craft stores, well-stocked grocery stores, and pickonus.com.*

MAKE AHEAD *Up to 4 hours, chilled.*

PER LOLLIPOP 121 Cal., 42% (51 Cal.) from fat; 0.4 g protein; 5.8 g fat (3.8 g sat.); 19 g carbo (1.5 g fiber); 142 mg sodium; 0 mg chol.

Salad Greens

The new crop of greens are anything but garden variety. Colorful and flavorful, they're superstars in your backyard—and on your plate.



Baby Lettuces with Beets

Serves 4 to 6 (makes 9 cups) / 1½ hours

You can make this with any small lettuces, but it's especially dramatic with maroon and chartreuse leaves. Spices unite the earthy beets and sweet lettuce.



3 medium beets, with roots and 1 in. of stems attached

½ cup walnut pieces

½ tsp. each cumin seeds and coriander seeds

½ tsp. kosher salt

¼ tsp. pepper

1 tsp. honey

1½ tbsp. red wine vinegar

Zest of ½ lemon

2 tbsp. each roasted walnut oil and extra-virgin olive oil (or use all olive oil)

⅔ cup pomegranate seeds, divided

2 qts. loosely packed small lettuce leaves (4 to 6 in.), preferably red and green

¼ cup small flat-leaf parsley leaves

1 small green onion, cut into 2-in. slivers

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Set beets in an 8-in. square pan with $\frac{1}{4}$ in. water. Cover tightly with foil and bake until tender, 1 to 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ hours. Also roast walnuts in a pie pan until golden, 12 to 15 minutes. Let cool.

2. Meanwhile, toast cumin and coriander in a frying pan over medium heat until fragrant, 3 to 4 minutes. Coarsely grind with a mortar and pestle. Pour into a small bowl. Whisk in salt, pepper, honey, vinegar, and lemon zest, then oils.

3. Rub beets with a paper towel to remove peel. Cut into matchsticks. Combine beets, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp. dressing, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pomegranate seeds; let stand 15 minutes.

4. In a large bowl, toss lettuces, parsley, and walnuts with 3 tbsp. dressing. Arrange on a platter. Spoon beet mixture down center and scatter onion on top. Sprinkle with remaining pomegranate seeds. Serve remaining dressing on the side.

PER 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -CUP SERVING 196 Cal., 73% (143 Cal.) from fat; 3.9 g protein; 16 g fat (1.7 g sat.); 12 g carbo (3.7g fiber); 180 mg sodium; 0 mg chol.

IN THE GARDEN

The rainbow effect



Landscaping with lettuce? Yes. In this half-moon-shaped bed (below), five types of lettuce create bands of color, each about 2 to 4 feet wide. To copy the look in a plot of any size, rake the soil smooth, trace free-form rows with a stick, then plant, slightly offsetting seedlings within the rows.



THE PLANTS

(*from left to right*): ‘Lingua di Canarino’ is an Italian heirloom oakleaf-type lettuce with a crunchy texture. ‘Hyper Red Rumble Waved’ has textured burgundy leaves. The new ‘Sweetie Baby’ romaine forms sweet, 6- to 8-inch-tall heads. ‘Breen’ is a deep red lettuce with compact heads. ‘Flashy Trout Back’ is a type of romaine with green leaves speckled in red.

IN THE GARDEN
Lettuce, squared



Instead of planting dutiful-looking rows, make a graphic statement with salad greens. This 4-foot-square raised bed (below) is planted with newly available compact varieties—which are perfect for containers or small gardens too.



THE PLANTS

‘Garden Babies’ butterhead (*center*) has buttery-tasting leaves. When deep red ‘Ruby Gem’ is sliced open, it reveals a green heart. The two outer green rows are ‘Sweetie Baby’ romaine, which has tall, narrow leaves.

Garden Bouquet Salad

Serves 4 / 30 minutes

Use edible flowers and herbs to decorate these pretty little salads any way you like.
Watch a video on how to make them at [sunset.com/saladbouquet](https://www.sunset.com/saladbouquet).



4 small whole lettuces (single-serving size), such as ‘Garden Babies’ or ‘Little Gem’

1½ tbsp. Champagne vinegar

2 tsp. finely cut chives

1 tbsp. finely chopped fresh dill, tarragon, or fennel leaves

¼ tsp. kosher salt

⅛ tsp. pepper

⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Chive pieces (4 to 5 in. long)

Small, tender dill, tarragon, or fennel sprigs

Edible flowers, such as whole nasturtiums and violas, or petals from roses or carnations

Paper-thin radish slices (optional)

1. Trim ends from lettuces, keeping leaves attached to base. Rinse gently but thoroughly. Drain, then wrap in kitchen towels and chill about 15 minutes to crisp.

2. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, whisk together vinegar, chives, dill, salt, pepper, and oil.

3. Set each lettuce on its base in a shallow soup bowl (for upright varieties like 'Little Gem', first crack leaves near their base so they splay out). Tuck in chive pieces, dill sprigs, and whole flowers. Scatter with flower petals and radishes, if you like. Serve with dressing on the side.

PER SERVING 168 Cal., 95% (160 Cal.) from fat; 0.8 g protein; 19 g fat (2.7 g sat.); 1.7 g carbo (0.7 g fiber); 98 mg sodium; 0 mg chol.

Growing guide



PLANTING

Lettuces are almost foolproof, whether you start plants from seed or seedlings. Where fall and winter temperatures are warm, plant in a partly shaded spot with loose, well-drained soil; in cool areas, they'll take full sun. Set loose-leaf varieties 4 inches apart; small heading types 6 to 8 inches apart. For a steady supply of greens until frost, start a new crop every two weeks.

CARE

Water seedbeds regularly until plants germinate. After that, keep roots moist. Feed once or twice during the growing season with an organic fertilizer. Use netting to keep birds from snacking on your crop.

HARVEST

Lettuce tastes best when it's young and tender. Slice heads from the ground with a harvest knife or gently uproot them. To keep a bed looking good longer, pick a few outer leaves from each plant at a time and let the center keep growing.

SOURCES

For varieties you can't find at your nursery, try cooksgarden.com, kitazawaseed.com, or reneesgarden.com.

Turnips



Growing guide



Turnips are best known for their plump roots, which come in various colors (white, purple, creamy yellow) and shapes. But the pleasantly bitter foliage is also edible.

PLANT Where winters are cold, plant in early spring for early-summer harvest, or in summer for fall harvest. Where winters are mild, plant in fall for a winter crop. Sow seeds 1 in. apart, then thin to 2–6 in. apart for roots, 1–4 in. apart for greens. Plant in a spot that gets full sun.

CARE Roots are milder if the soil is kept moist; they become more pungent under drier conditions. Feed with a liquid fertilizer after seedlings are up, then again monthly.

HARVEST Turnip roots grow fast and should be harvested and used as soon as they are big enough to eat, usually about 75 days after sowing.

Turnips Anna

Serves 4 to 6 / 1½ hours

Pommes Anna, a classic French dish of thinly sliced potatoes, takes on an appealing sharpness in this turnip version. Although you can use any pie pans, metal ones brown the turnips most evenly; you'll also need a handheld slicer.



About 6 tbsp. butter, melted, divided

6 oz. sliced bacon

½ cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese

2 tbsp. flour

½ tsp. minced fresh thyme leaves, plus several thyme sprigs

½ tsp. kosher salt

¼ tsp. pepper

2 lbs. small to medium turnips (any variety), peeled and ends trimmed

1. Generously brush a 9-in. pie pan with some butter. Preheat oven to 400° (if using metal pans) or 425° (if using glass or ceramic) with a rack set in lower third of oven.

2. Brown bacon in a medium frying pan until crisp, 6 to 8 minutes. Drain on paper towels, then chop.

3. Combine bacon, cheese, flour, minced thyme, salt, and pepper in a small bowl.
4. Thinly slice turnips into rounds with a handheld slicer. Arrange one-sixth of turnips in a layer in pie pan, starting from center, working outward in concentric circles, and slightly overlapping slices. Evenly sprinkle a heaping 2 tbsp. bacon-cheese mixture over turnips and drizzle with about 2 tsp. butter. Repeat to use all ingredients, ending with turnips.
5. Lightly butter bottom of another 9-in. pie pan and set on top of turnips. Fill upper pan with pie weights or dried beans; set pans on a rimmed baking sheet to catch bubbling butter.
6. Bake until edge turns golden brown, 50 to 55 minutes. Carefully remove top pie pan and weights and continue to bake Anna until browned on top, 10 to 15 minutes more.
7. Loosen Anna from pan with a knife and invert onto a plate. Top with thyme sprigs.

PER SERVING 214 Cal., 71% (152 Cal.) from fat; 6 g protein; 17 g fat (10 g sat.); 10 g carbo (2.3 g fiber); 487 mg sodium; 47 mg chol.

Spinach



Growing guide



This famously nutritious cool-season annual grows in upright, leafy clumps to about 1 foot tall.

PLANT Sow in fall or late winter or early spring; to get successive harvests, make small sowings at weekly intervals in fall or early spring. Spinach takes full sun in cool months; for later sowing, plant between taller vegetables that will provide partial shade. Plant it in fertile, well-draining soil.

CARE Spinach needs regular water and a balanced fertilizer, especially in spring.

HARVEST Spinach is ready for harvest in about 7 weeks, when leaves have reached full size (6–12 in. tall); pick individual leaves, or cut the entire clump at ground level.

Creamy Spinach Chickpea Soup

Serves 6 (makes 8 cups) / 1 ¼ hours

Curry, ginger, and mint give this soup a kick, while puréed chickpeas make it hearty enough to eat as a main course. For the best texture, purée until silky smooth.



- 4½ tbsp. canola oil, divided**
 - ¾ cup diced shallots (2 medium)**
 - 1 tbsp. minced garlic**
 - 2 tbsp. minced fresh ginger**
 - 2 cans (15 oz. each) chickpeas (garbanzos), drained and rinsed**
 - 5 cups reduced-sodium chicken or vegetable broth**
 - 1 tsp. kosher salt**
 - 6 cups packed spinach leaves (from about 10 oz. bunch spinach, rinsed well and stems trimmed)**
 - 1¼ tsp. curry powder**
 - 1½ tbsp. lime juice**
 - 2 tbsp. small whole or chopped fresh mint leaves**
- 1.** Heat 3 tbsp. oil in a medium pot over medium heat and add shallots. Cook,

stirring occasionally, until softened and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and ginger and cook until aromatic, about 1 minute more.

2. Add chickpeas, broth, and salt. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer and cook until flavors are well blended and chickpeas are very soft, about 25 minutes. Add spinach and cook just until softened and bright green, about 2 minutes. Let cool 5 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, heat remaining 1½ tbsp. oil in a small frying pan over medium-low heat. Stir in curry powder and cook until aromatic, 30 seconds. Remove from heat.

4. Whirl half of soup at a time in a blender, starting on low speed, until very smooth. Ladle into bowls. Just before serving, stir lime juice into curry oil and drizzle over soup. Garnish with mint.

PER SERVING (ABOUT 1½ CUPS) 226 Cal., 50% (112 Cal.) from fat; 9.5 g protein; 13 g fat (1.2 g sat.); 20 g carbo (0.9 g fiber); 527 mg sodium; 21 mg chol.

Broccoli



Growing guide



Broccoli is among the most satisfying crops for the home gardener. It's very productive over a long season, easy to grow, delicious, and very healthful.

PLANT In mild climates, plant in late summer, fall, or winter. In cold-winter areas, set out young plants 2 to 4 weeks before the last frost (young plants resist frost but not hard freezes). Broccoli needs full sun to put on early growth and encourage heads to form. Space plants 1½–2 ft. apart in rows 3 ft. apart.

CARE Keep plants growing vigorously with regular deep irrigation during dry periods. Feed once or twice with a complete fertilizer before heads or florets start to form.

HARVEST Start cutting 50 to 100 days after setting out plants but before clustered buds begin to open. Include 5–6 in. of edible stalk and leaves. Cut the smaller side-branch heads that form after the main head has been harvested; be sure to get them before they flower.

Chicken and Broccoli Alfredo

Serves 6 / 30 minutes

This recipe turns a beloved pasta dish—rich, creamy Alfredo—into an easy one-pot endeavor.



12 oz. broccoli florets, cut into bite-size pieces

1 boned, skinned chicken breast half (14 oz.), cubed

8 oz. fettuccine

$\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup heavy whipping cream

About $\frac{1}{2}$ cup freshly shredded parmesan cheese

Kosher salt and pepper

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook broccoli until tender and bright green, 2 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to a colander, leaving water in pot. Add chicken to pot; cook until opaque, 2 to 4 minutes. Transfer to colander with broccoli.

2. Cook pasta in same pot of water until just tender to the bite, about 10 minutes. Reserve $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pasta water; drain pasta.

3. Simmer cream, reserved $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup parmesan in same pot over medium heat, stirring often. Add broccoli, chicken, and pasta, stirring to combine. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve with additional parmesan on the side.

PER SERVING 368 Cal., 39% (144 cal.) from fat; 24 g protein; 16 g fat (8.7 g sat.); 33 g carbo (2.8 g fiber); 235 mg sodium; 91 mg chol.

Cabbage



Growing guide



Cabbage grows in heads of various sizes, from barely larger than a softball to big as a small boulder, in shades of green, red, and purple, and in textures from smooth to frilly.

PLANT Time plantings so heads will form either before or after hot summer months. In the low or intermediate desert or in mild coastal conditions, give crop full sun, but stick to partial shade in hot-summer interiors.

CARE Plants thrive in moist soil. Water often enough that plants never wilt. Give frequent light applications of nitrogen fertilizer.

HARVEST Use pruners or loppers to cut off heads when they're firm and well formed, and before they split or crack. Light frost doesn't hurt cabbage, but harvest and store before heavy freezes occur.

Savoy Cabbage Gratin

Serves 6 to 8 as a side dish / 45 minutes

Think mac 'n' cheese—but with vegetables instead of noodles. This gratin is a warming winter side dish, though it's so good you might be tempted to call it dinner.



About 4 tbsp. butter, divided

1 small head savoy cabbage (about 1½ lbs.), cored and cut into 8 wedges

About ¾ tsp. kosher salt

About ½ tsp. pepper

1 garlic clove, chopped

1½ tsp. chopped fresh thyme leaves, plus thyme sprigs

¼ tsp. nutmeg

1 tbsp. flour

1 cup heavy whipping cream

¾ cup shredded aged gouda cheese*

½ cup fresh bread crumbs

1. Butter a shallow 2-qt. baking dish (about 8 by 11 in.) and preheat oven to 400°.
2. Melt 2 tbsp. butter in a sauté pan* or large frying pan over medium-high heat and

add cabbage wedges cut side down. Sprinkle with $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. salt and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. pepper; cook, turning once, until lightly browned, 5 to 7 minutes.

3. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water to pan. Partially cover and cook until cabbage is just tender, 3 to 5 minutes more.

4. Transfer cabbage and any stray leaves to prepared dish, arranging wedges so they lie flat (they should fit snugly).

5. Return pan to medium heat and melt remaining 2 tbsp. butter. Add garlic, chopped thyme, nutmeg, and flour. Stir until thoroughly combined, add cream, and cook, stirring, just until thickened and bubbling, about 2 minutes.

6. Pour cream mixture over cabbage. Top with cheese and bread crumbs. Bake until browned and bubbling, about 20 minutes. Garnish with thyme sprigs and season to taste with more salt and pepper.

**Look for a gouda that's light golden or caramel colored and aged at least 18 months. A sauté pan is a frying pan with sides about 2 in. high.*

PER SERVING 235 Cal., 74% (173 Cal.) from fat; 5.8 g protein; 19 g fat (12 g sat.); 11 g carbo (2.5 g fiber); 349 mg sodium; 66 mg chol.

Winter Squash



Growing guide



Winter squash are grown for harvest in early fall and store well, thanks to hard rinds and firm flesh. They come in many colors and shapes (such as butternut, acorn, and banana).

PLANT Direct-sow seeds in the garden 1 in. deep when soil temperature reaches at least 55°F. Choose an open site with full sun and plenty of room. Bush and compact varieties can be planted 2–4 ft. apart in rows. Vining winter squash varieties need 5-ft. spacing in rows. Give all kinds of squash rich, well-draining soil, and for viners especially, plenty of room.

CARE Roots need regular moisture, but leaves and stems should be kept as dry as possible to prevent leaf and fruit diseases. Apply a balanced fertilizer periodically.

HARVEST Winter squash should stay on the vines until it is thoroughly hardened; harvest it with an inch of stem and store in a cool place (about 55°).

Butternut Squash Spice Cake

Serves 10 to 12 / 2½ hours

Watch out, carrot cake. An intriguing mix of spices, plus coconut sugar for subtle sweetness, put this butternut squash cake over the top. (And did we mention the bourbon?) You'll need 3 round cake pans (8 in. each).



CAKE

2 cups cake flour

1 cup whole-wheat pastry flour or sifted regular whole-wheat flour

1 tsp. *each* baking soda, baking powder, kosher salt, and cinnamon

2 tsp. ground cardamom

½ tsp. ground star anise (grind in a clean coffee grinder) or ground allspice

1 cup canola oil

2 large eggs

1 cup coconut palm sugar* or packed dark brown sugar

½ cup *each* vanilla yogurt and orange juice

¼ cup bourbon

1 tbsp. *each* vanilla extract and orange zest

⅓ cup chopped crystallized ginger

2¾ cups coarsely shredded butternut squash

FROSTING

¾ cup salted butter, softened

12 oz. (1½ large pkgs.) cream cheese, softened

3 cups powdered sugar

1 tbsp. bourbon

2 tsp. ground cardamom

¾ tsp. *each* kosher salt, cinnamon, and ground ginger

1 cup toasted* unsweetened flaked (also called shaved) coconut

1. Make cake: Preheat oven to 350°. Grease 3 round cake pans (8 in. each). Line each with a circle of parchment paper and set aside.
2. Mix cake flour, whole-wheat flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, cardamom, and star anise in a large bowl; set aside.
3. In bowl of a stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment, beat oil, eggs, coconut sugar, yogurt, orange juice, bourbon, and vanilla on medium speed until well blended. Add flour mixture; beat on low speed to blend, then on medium speed until smooth, scraping inside of bowl twice. Stir in orange zest and crystallized ginger, then squash.
4. Divide batter among lined pans and spread level. Bake until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 20 to 24 minutes.
5. Turn cakes onto racks, remove parchment, and let cool completely, 1 to 1½ hours.
6. Make frosting: In bowl of a stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment, beat butter and cream cheese until very smooth. Add powdered sugar, bourbon, cardamom, salt, cinnamon, and ginger; beat on low speed to blend, then on high speed until smooth and fluffy, scraping inside of bowl once or twice.
7. Set a cake layer rounded side down on a platter; spread top of it with ¾ cup frosting. Repeat with second layer. Set top layer in place, rounded side up. Spread top and sides of cake with remaining frosting. Press coconut into sides, a small handful at a time.

** Find coconut palm sugar in the baking aisle of well-stocked grocery stores. Toast coconut on a rimmed baking sheet in a 350° oven until light golden, stirring once, 4 to 5 minutes.*

MAKE AHEAD Up to 1 day, chilled and loosely wrapped with plastic wrap.

PER SERVING 777 Cal., 52% (405 Cal.) from fat; 7 g protein; 46 g fat (18 g sat.); 88 g carbo (3.3 g fiber); 570 mg sodium; 98 mg chol.

CHAPTER 3

Workbook

Basic techniques and easy tips to grow a bumper crop of healthy produce



Getting Started

Get off to a great start with smart planning and rich soil

Provide good soil



Healthy gardens start with healthy soil, and most crops want to grow in ground that's rich, fertile, and well draining. Few plots have perfect soil—more often it's too sandy, which lets water and nutrients drain away quickly, or it's too heavy and claylike, which drains poorly and makes it hard for roots to spread. Fortunately, no matter what type of soil you have, you can improve it by adding amendments such as compost.

Add compost

Compost is one of the best soil amendments and easy to make. A pile of leaves, branches, or other garden trimmings tossed in a corner of the garden will eventually decompose with no intervention on your part. However, it can take as long as a year to produce results. With a little effort, you can hasten the process considerably. If you create optimum conditions for the organisms responsible for decay by giving them the mixture of air, water, and materials rich in carbon and nitrogen that they need, your compost pile will heat up quickly and decompose in a few months. This process also destroys many (though not all) weeds and disease pathogens. Gardeners often need more compost than they can produce; fortunately, good-quality compost is also widely available from commercial sources.

Choose crops



Deciding which edibles to grow can be both exciting and a bit daunting. A good place to start is to consider what crops you and your family really enjoy eating? Will you use the harvest right away, or do you plan to store some food for winter? Beyond the tried-and-true favorites, it's fun to sample a few new varieties each season.

Place wisely

The majority of edibles need 6 to 8 hours of full sun daily for top production and flavor. Select a site that is not shaded by buildings, trees, or shrubs. Remember that shadows lengthen in fall and winter to the north of tall structures, so use a compass to determine the direction of north and make sure any tall plants or structures to the south won't cast shadows on your site in those seasons. In addition to blocking sunlight, trees and shrubs send roots far and wide, competing with your edibles for water and nutrients. Also consider air circulation. While most edibles do not thrive in heavy winds, airflow from gentle breezes helps keep foliage dry

Layer on mulch

Organic mulches are derived from once- living matter and improve the soil and add nutrients as they slowly decompose. Mulches that work well around plants in garden beds include compost, leaf mold, straw, and grass clippings (be sure to apply clippings in thin layers, letting each layer dry before applying another). For permanent garden paths, choose materials that break down more slowly, such as shredded or ground bark or wood chips. Apply organic mulches in a 2- to 4-inch layer, but take care not to cover the plants' crowns (where the stem meets the soil); too much moisture near the crown can cause rot.

Make a veggie bed in one day

How to go from bare dirt to growing garden in no time at all.

1. PLAN AND SHOP



Choose a spot that you can reach with your hose and gets at least six hours of sun a day. Sketch a plan, taking into account how large everything will be when fully grown—don't jam the plants too close together. Then go buy your seedlings and enough bagged compost to spread a 6-inch-deep layer—we used 16 cubic feet for a 4- by 8-foot bed.

2. AMEND YOUR SOIL



When you get home, water the seedlings thoroughly while they're still in their plastic containers. Then spread compost over your entire planting bed. Mix it in with a digging fork, removing any rocks, and rake the area flat—this will help water soak in evenly. Now break for a long lunch.

3. PLANT AND WATER



After the heat of the day has passed, set out the seedlings according to your plan. Tip plants out from their pots and gently loosen any matted roots with your fingers, then plant each seedling so that the top of its rootball is level with the soil. Water your new garden well, even though it's late afternoon (usually, you'll want to water it in early morning). Apply a layer of organic mulch to seal in moisture and prevent weeds.

4. WATCH IT GROW!



For most annual vegetables, compost dug into the soil at planting time is enough sustenance for the entire growing season. Things will really take off when the weather gets even warmer—in about six to eight weeks, your garden should start looking like the one above.

Planting and Staking

Getting your crops in the ground and supporting them as they grow



A sampling of seed packets from Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds. Find their full collection of seeds online at rareseeds.com.

Sowing seeds

Many vegetables grow best if you plant the seeds where they are to grow in the garden rather than starting them indoors and transplanting them later. These include root crops (carrots, beets, radishes, turnips, and parsnips) and corn, peas, and beans.

Plan to sow seeds after the soil has warmed in spring; if sown in cold soil, most will germinate poorly or not at all. Check the seed packet for sowing time for each crop. Soil should be loose and crumbly; rake it smooth, so seedlings can push through. Refer to the seed packet for the proper planting depth; seeds planted too deep will not sprout. In general, seeds should be covered to a depth equal to twice the diameter of the seed.

The right amount of water after sowing keeps soil moist but not soggy and prevents crusts from forming on the soil surface. Water with a fine mist, so that seeds aren't

washed away. In hot weather, covering the soil with damp burlap helps retain moisture. Be sure to remove the burlap as soon as seeds begin to sprout. If you plan to water with basins or furrows, make them before sowing seeds so as not to disturb the freshly planted seedbed.

Some seeds will not germinate, no matter how careful you are. For this reason, gardeners usually sow seeds close together and then thin any overcrowded seedlings to their proper spacing (noted on seed packets) when they are 1 to 2 inches tall. Following are three methods of sowing.



MAKE SHALLOW FURROWS to sow seeds in rows. Use a trowel or the corner of a hoe to make a furrow the correct depth for the seeds you are planting. Sow seeds evenly, and pat soil gently over them. To make straight rows, stretch a string between two stakes, and plant beneath it. Or lay a board on the surface of the soil, then plant along its edge.



USE HILLS—groups of plants growing in a cluster, often in a low mound of soil—rather than rows for sprawling plants, if you wish. This is a traditional way to grow squash and melons. Sow 5 or 6 seeds in a circle, and pat the soil over them.

BROADCAST SEEDS to sow wide bands of vegetables across a bed. This is more space efficient than row-planting for smaller crops such as lettuce, carrots, radishes, or mesclun. Scatter the seeds evenly over the soil. Cover by scattering soil over the seeds or by raking gently, first in one direction and then again at right angles. Pat the soil to firm it.

Setting out seedlings

Seedlings of annual vegetables that you've grown yourself or purchased from a

nursery are usually set out from small containers such as 4-inch pots. Transplant seedlings of warm-season crops after all danger of frost is past, when the soil is fairly dry and has warmed up. Prevent transplant shock by being sure to water the seedlings before transplanting them, and always avoid planting during the hottest part of the day. Dig a hole for each plant, making it the same depth as the seedling container and an inch or two wider.



1. WITH YOUR FINGERS, lightly separate the roots so they can grow out into the soil. If there is a pad of coiled roots at the bottom of the root ball, pull it off.



2. PLACE EACH PLANT in its hole so that the top of the root ball is even with the soil surface. (Tomatoes are an exception; they are planted more deeply.) Firm the soil around the roots.



3. WATER EACH PLANT with a gentle flow that won't disturb soil or roots. After planting, water frequently to keep the soil moist but not soggy.

STAKING VEGETABLES

Room to grow

Training vining edibles such as pole beans, peas, tomatoes, cucumbers, melons, and squash to grow up stakes, trellises, or other supports pays off in several ways. It saves space to grow these plants vertically rather than letting them sprawl across the ground. And you'll harvest more fruits, both because they'll be easier to see and pick and because they won't come into contact with the soil, where they might rot. Put up your stakes and trellises at planting time. If you try to stake plants after they have begun to sprawl, you risk disturbing the roots and breaking the stems. Train or tie the plants as they grow.

Common materials for vegetable supports are wire mesh, wooden stakes and string, and bamboo, but you can also use rustic twigs, decorative metal or wooden structures, copper pipe, or bent reinforcing bar.

1. A weathered ladder



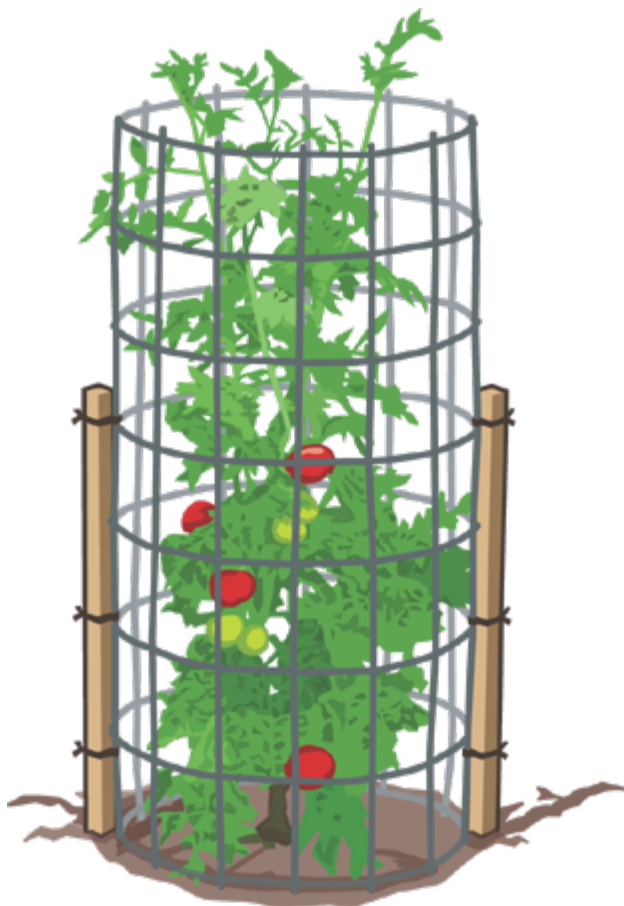
Sink the legs of an old ladder into 6-inch-deep holes so it won't blow over, and wrap string, wire, or wire mesh around it to help plants such as peas, beans, and cucumbers climb.

2. A sturdy frame



Leaning on a sunny wall, a sturdy frame makes a trellis for cucumber, melon, or squash vines. Support heavy fruits with netting or cloth slings tied to the trellis.

3. A wire cage



This is especially useful to support a tomato plant. Buy a 6½-foot length of 5- or 6-foot-wide concrete-reinforcing wire. Roll it into a cylinder 24 inches in diameter and hold it together with wire. Anchor the cage with stakes.

4. A wooden obelisk



Purchased or homemade from lumber or tree branches, an obelisk supports tomatoes and brings height and interest to garden beds. Tie stems to the support as they grow.

5. Strings stretched



Pulled tautly over a wooden A-frame, strings provide support for climbing tendrils.

Watering and Protection

Keep your fruit and vegetables perfectly hydrated, and protect them from cold temps and hungry pests



Veggies in dry times

Can you still grow summer edibles, even during a drought? Yes—just plan carefully. Here's how we do it in our Test Garden.

KEEP BEDS SMALL Plant only as many crops as you'll eat. Our curved raised bed, measuring 16 feet long and barely 4 feet wide, contains eggplant, peppers, pole beans, basil, sage, one zucchini, and an artichoke.

AMEND THE SOIL To improve its water retention, we mixed a 6-inch layer of compost into the soil before planting.

MULCH Organic mulch (leaves, straw, or bark) can cut water use in half by reducing evaporation. We covered the soil with a 3-inch layer of bark chips.

TARGET WATERING Drip irrigation is far more efficient than sprinklers at getting moisture to plant roots. We used ¼-inch tubing with emitters predrilled every 6 inches, and watered our plants deeply twice a week for 45 minutes. Soaker hoses work well too.

Easy Does It

Food crops need a steady supply of water throughout the growing season. Yet too much water, especially in poorly drained soil, deprives plant roots of oxygen, which may also kill them. Both of these methods deliver water slowly, keeping plants healthy, weed growth down, and fungal diseases at bay.

SOIL SOAKER HOSES These forerunners of drip irrigation systems are useful for slow, steady delivery of water. They are long tubes made of perforated or porous plastic or rubber with hose fittings at one end. When you attach a soaker to a hose and turn on the water supply, water seeps or sprinkles from the soaker along its entire length. Soakers are ideal for watering rows of vegetables; to water beds, snake the soaker back and forth around the plants. Trees can be watered with a soaker coiled around the outer edges of the root zone.

DRIP IRRIGATION Drip systems deliver water slowly either by drip emitters that you attach to plastic tubing yourself or by emitter lines—tubes with factory-installed emitters spaced at regular intervals. They can be adjusted so that the water is applied only to soil directly over plant roots, much reducing the amount of water needed. By choosing specific kinds of tubing and emitters, you can tailor systems to water individual plants, beds of closely spaced plants, trees, or containers.

Glass cloches



Cloches (“bells” in French) form miniature one-plant greenhouses that can save your tender crops on cold nights. Plus, they add a touch of fancy whimsy to the garden. Remember to remove cloches on sunny days to prevent overheating. Order your own from a mail-order seed company, or look for them at housewares or import stores like World Market.

Bird netting



Protect crops from marauding birds with netting. Enclose trees with netting two to three weeks before fruit ripens, tying it around the trunk beneath the lowest branches or securing it to the ground so birds can't find an opening. For ground-level crops, you can drape the lightweight netting directly over the plants or make little arches out of bendable masonry reinforcement ladders (sold in 10-foot-long sections at hardware stores). Sink sharp ends into soil; drape netting on top and secure all sides by pushing landscape staples through netting into soil.

Floating row covers



Made of lightweight fabrics sold in rolls, floating row covers protect plants from cold air, birds, and many flying insects. Permeable to sunlight, air, and water, row covers can be laid directly over seeded beds or plants. If you plan to leave the covers in place for any length of time, allow enough extra fabric so the plants can push up the cover as they grow.

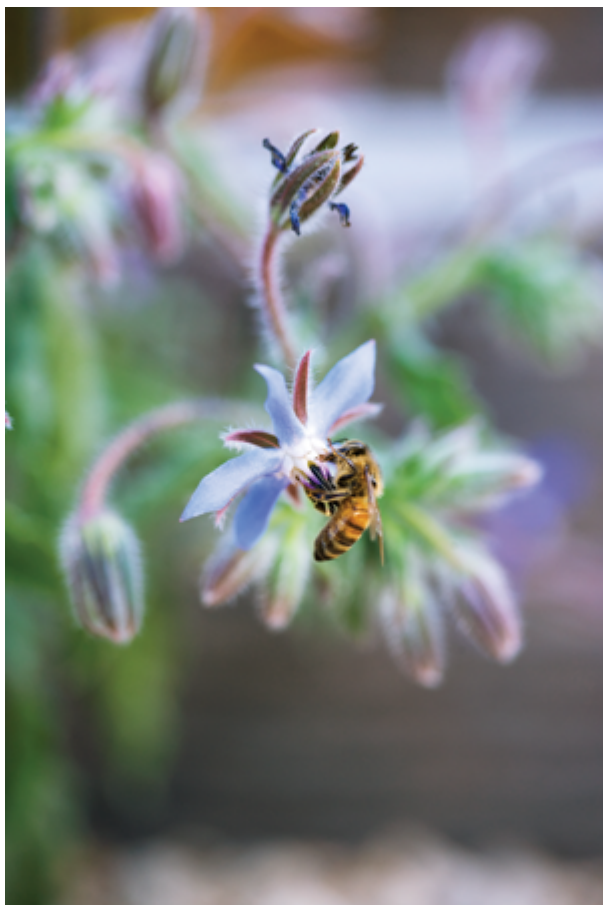
Simple frost blanket



If you live in a relatively mild part of the intermountain West, then here's a trick that can help protect container plants through an exceptionally hard frost. Grab a tomato cage from storage and invert it over your container as shown, so the ends stick up in the air. (Placing a small cafe table or an outdoor chair—right side up—over the plant would also work. In the evening, drape thick plastic, burlap, or other fabric over the cage, making sure it doesn't touch the plant's foliage. The next morning, after temperatures have begun to rise, remove the cover and the cage.

Bringing It Together, Naturally

Here are steps you can take to keep your garden vibrant, abundant, and relatively chemical-free.



Invite bees.

Pick the right site If you give plants the right amount of sunlight, good soil, and adequate air circulation, insect and disease problems will be few. Trouble most often appears when you try to grow plants in marginal conditions.

Consider the soil To grow vegetables or strawberries, first dig about 4 inches of compost into the top foot of soil; compost is equally effective at improving sandy and heavy (clay) soil. To grow shrubs or trees, don't bother amending the soil unless it is very heavy or very light. Just dig a planting hole 12 to 24 inches deep in native soil, set out bare-root stock, water well, and mulch over it with organic matter.

Choose disease-resistant plants All categories of plants are susceptible to problems. When susceptibility to a specific disease is noted for a plant you want, shop for a resistant variety so you won't have to worry about treatment later.

Apply Natural Fertilizers Fertilizer manufacturers have done a great job of

standardizing, labeling, sanitizing, and packaging a wide range of natural fertilizers, from bat guano to cottonseed meal. They have devised fast- and slow-release formulations, liquid and pellet versions, and even included mycorrhizal supplements to enhance the soil food web and improve overall plant growth.

Conserve water Mulch saves water by keeping the soil beneath it moister for longer. Drip irrigation cuts water use dramatically, reduces disease problems, and improves plant performance. And rain barrels and cisterns capture rainwater flowing through your house's downspouts for use as needed in the garden.

Put beneficial creatures to work Insectaries sell everything from lady beetles and trichogramma wasps to praying mantids, lacewings, predatory mites, and parasitic nematodes. All eat garden pests. But you can also increase the number of natural beneficials in your garden by planting lots of flowers and avoiding the use of broad-spectrum pesticides.

Encourage pollinators Hit by major outbreaks of tracheal mites, varroa mites, and colony collapse disorder, North American honeybee populations have plummeted. You can make your garden more bee-friendly by avoiding the use of broad-spectrum pesticides and by keeping flowers blooming in the garden over as much of the year as possible. To service early-flowering fruit trees and other plants that may need pollination when it is still too cold for honeybees to be active, install mason bee nests in the garden (nurseries and mail-order garden supply companies sell them). In addition to honeybees, there are more than 1,600 species of native wild bees; many are especially attracted to local native plants.

Use mechanical pest controls where possible Row covers exclude insects and birds from vulnerable plants. Sticky barriers keep ants out of trees (ants tend and defend aphids), and some sticky traps use pheromones that lure target insects only. Copper barriers can keep slugs and snails at bay. There are even quick-burst sprinklers triggered by motion sensors to frighten deer away.

Consider integrated pest management This strategy starts with prevention, using disease-resistant varieties, optimal cultural practices, and pest monitoring. If pests start doing significant damage, integrated pest management (IPM) encourages use of the most targeted, least environmentally destructive control measure available. That might be a mechanical or biological control, but it might also be a hard chemical control. While IPM is environmentally responsible, it isn't strictly organic.

Raise chickens Most cities allow you to raise at least a few chickens (but often not roosters). They're great eaters of bugs and vegetable scraps, producers of eggs, and suppliers of high-quality manure. And besides all that, they're fun to raise!

Save seed If you raise nonhybrid (open-pollinated) vegetables, you can save seeds from the strongest plants for replanting the following year. Just harvest and dry the seeds and store them in a cool, dark, dry, insect-free place until planting time the next year. Over time, you'll develop varieties perfectly suited to your own garden.

Pull or hoe weeds before they set seed Do your hoeing on a clear, dry morning; midday sun will desiccate the remains of tiny weeds by nightfall. Pull bigger weeds

the day after a soaking rain; taproots slip easily out of moist soil.



You know your food is healthy and fresh when you grow it yourself—and harvest it right outside your back door.

Sunset

EASY EDIBLE GARDENING

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ON THE COVER A bumper crop, fresh from [Valerie Rice's raised beds](#). *Photograph by Thomas J. Story.*

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